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CRISIS AND COMPLACENCY:
PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION,
WORLD WAR II, THE COLD WAR—AND BEYOND

A SENIOR HONORS THESIS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT, SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE
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INTRODUCTION

Speeches are important because they are one of the great constants of our political history. For two hundred years, from “Give me liberty or give me death” to “Ask not what your country can do for you,” they have been not only the way we measure public men, they have been how we tell each other who we are. For two hundred years they have been changing -- making, forcing -- history: Lincoln, Bryan and the cross of gold, FDR’s first inaugural, Kennedy’s, Martin Luther King in ’63, Reagan and the Speech in ’64. They count. They more than count, they shape what happens.

Peggy Noonan, speechwriter for Presidents Reagan and Bush, made this declaration in her 1990 book, *What I Saw at the Revolution*. Her argument is debatable. Indeed, the speeches she cited are memorable, even brilliant, but for this very reason it cannot be true that political speeches are a historical constant. In recent years the quality of political, especially presidential, speeches has decreased noticeably, and many factors explain this phenomenon. The advent of television, the increasing presence of the news media, and countless other elements surely play a role in the demise of political rhetoric in the modern era. Yet even Noonan, who is known as one of the most talented speechwriters since the field became popularly recognized, could not overcome such problems. In fact, she contributed to them both by continuing the recent tradition of empty (albeit pretty) rhetoric and by publicly claiming credit for her work, thereby taking credibility from the words of the president.

Noonan likely knows better than anyone that the American people criticize modern political rhetoric in general, but she also knows that, speech by speech, the people react favorably to poetic imagery, appeals to patriotism, and references to earlier days of the American government. The people, then, propagate the belief among practicing speechwriters that aesthetics and trite historical allusions are the best way to raise a candidate’s popularity, which is, in this era of opinion polls and media influence, the most immediate goal of a given speech.

The field of political rhetoric seems to be polarized so that those who critique speeches and take an interest in improving them have no control over their content. Those who are responsible for putting words in the president’s mouth aim only to portray him to the people as intelligent, informed, and eloquent. Scholars who study the field, on the other hand, are

generally interested in maintaining and improving Americans' relationship with the political process as a whole.

As the chief executive of the nation, all American presidents clearly play a rhetorical role within the context of their constitutional duties, but the interpretation of these duties has changed with time, and a president's direct interaction with his constituents has changed considerably from the Founders' original conception of the presidency. Direct contact between presidents and citizens has dramatically increased since the nation's founding, and the concept of a "rhetorical presidency,"¹ developed and expanded by many scholars in the last two decades, is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon.

Presidential roles and responsibilities, although partially determined by the dictates of the Constitution, are necessarily subject to the myriad social and political circumstances of a given era. At the Constitution's drafting, the notion of the president as the ultimate representative of the people did not exist as it does today. The Founders' conception of the purpose of the executive office essentially consisted, quite simply, of the execution of laws; this branch would even be kept far from purely legislative matters—and certainly far from the people. The framers of the Constitution, still fearful of tyranny but newly aware that a weak executive branch such as that under the Articles of Confederation would fail, devoted very little discussion to the responsibilities of the executive office they were constructing, and none at all to the possibility of direct presidential interaction with the people. Details, such as the form the executive would take, the term of office, and the manner of election, were the subject of considerable debate, but it was merely assumed by all present that the president would not interact directly with the nation. It would never have occurred to these men that the executive might someday address the people. Instead, the congressional representatives of each state and its districts were charged with responding directly to their constituents, and the president's responsibilities were largely restricted to the execution of laws, foreign affairs, and his commander-in-chief role. Moreover, the vastness of the country and the lack of technology simply did not allow for anyone to traverse the territory as one currently can. Representatives were elected from each state to serve constituents' needs in the national government, and the president was to be primarily a facilitator of the law. While he would be involved with the

¹ James W. Ceasar, Glen E. Thurow, Jeffrey Tulis, and Joseph M. Bessette, "The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 2 (1981): 158-71.

day-to-day workings of the government, his direct contact with the people at large would be eschewed.

The Constitution explicitly provides for only one major rhetorical occasion: “He shall from time to time give to Congress information on the state of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.”² According to the Constitution, however, even this address may be delivered orally or in writing; since the beginning of the twentieth century, it has consistently been given orally and is now televised. Additionally, the Constitution allows for other presidential public speaking opportunities (for instance, in the veto message and through his pardoning powers), but these are secondary and used infrequently.

Clearly, the Founders’ conception of the relationship between the legislative and executive branches differs considerably from the current state of affairs; the president now works so closely with Congress that he always knows of their endeavors, and they of his, which eliminates the need for the constitutionally mandated annual message. Moreover, modern technology precludes Congress’ or the people’s not knowing about the president’s actions and initiatives—ignorance through lack of information is impossible (although apathy arguably runs rampant). Today, the annual state of the union speech has become more of a popular address than an opportunity to convey information to the Congress, and the president doubtless uses the occasion to draw support from the people.

Thus, the Constitution itself does not devote much attention to the possibility of presidential rhetoric aimed at the entire population. However, the *Federalist Papers* offer additional insight into the Founders’ conceptions of presidential rhetoric. Moreover, early American leaders (especially George Washington, whose presidency established many precedents for future leaders) helped to interpret the Constitution; these two factors complement the brief—and perhaps overly succinct—text of the Constitution, contributing the political traditions Americans generally associate with the nation’s primary legal document. In *Federalist* No. 68, which discusses the election of the president, Alexander Hamilton endorsed the procedure as follows:

The process of election affords a moral certainty, that the office of President will never fall to the lot of any man who is not in an eminent degree endowed with the requisite qualifications. Talents for low intrigue, and the little arts of

² Constitution of the United States, Article II, Section 3.

popularity, may alone suffice to elevate a man to the first honors in a single State; but it will require other talents, and a different kind of merit, to establish him in the esteem and confidence of the whole Union ³

Thus, advocates of the Constitution believed that the country was sufficiently large to prevent popular appeals, but with the rise of technology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—in terms of both quicker, more convenient travel and devices such as radio, television, and the Internet—modern presidents are now able to reach the entire nation. Moreover, they have understood the value of appealing to the people through speeches and other means and have reshaped the presidency around this new audience.

While the Constitution makes no specific reference to the president's inauguration beyond presenting the oath of office all presidents must take, Washington, who is responsible for a large part of American presidential tradition, established the following inaugural protocol in his own first inaugural address:

By the article establishing the executive department it is made the duty of the president "to recommend to your consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." The circumstances under which I now meet you will acquit me from entering into that subject further than to refer to the great constitutional charter under which you are assembled, and which, in defining your powers, designates the objects to which your attention is to be given. It will be more consistent with those circumstances, and far more congenial with the feelings which actuate me, to substitute, in place of a recommendation of particular measures, the tribute that is due to the talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism which adorn the characters selected to devise and adopt them.⁴

Most presidents since Washington have followed his precedent, and many have expanded on the role of the inaugural ceremony in their own addresses, as did Benjamin Harrison in 1889:

Fellow citizens: There is no constitutional or legal requirement that the president shall take the oath of office in the presence of the people, but there is so manifest an appropriateness in the public induction to office of the chief executive of the nation that from the beginning of the Government the people, to whose service the official oath consecrates the officer, have been called to witness the solemn ceremonial.⁵

More recently, the inaugural, as possibly the most popularly attended political speech, has come to epitomize Americans' criticism of their presidents' words in general. This genre of

³ *Federalist* no. 68.

⁴ George Washington, First Inaugural Address, 1793.

⁵ Benjamin Harrison, First Inaugural Address, 1889.

address certainly provides the most consistent record of American presidential rhetoric, reflecting both historical influences on the nation and rhetorical trends since the 1790s.

The remaining genres of presidential rhetoric, identified by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson as the speeches of ascendant vice-presidents, war rhetoric, impeachment rhetoric, and farewell addresses,⁶ have entered into use in subtler ways—generally as political circumstances necessitated it—and will be discussed accordingly in this study.

Clearly, the same Constitution has functioned in dramatically different ways for forty-two presidents over more than two hundred years. By the time of Abraham Lincoln's administration, for instance, the American people had definite expectations regarding how their leader would interact with them and with the circumstances surrounding him; "to become president, Lincoln had had to talk more radically on occasion than he actually felt; to be an effective president he was compelled to act more conservatively than he wanted."⁷ Yet the Constitution itself, written in the wake of the Revolution and out of the failure of the Articles of Confederation, remains largely unaltered in its wording (and essentially unchanged in its original intent). The role of the president as established in 1787 now merely provides a starting point from which to interpret the office and its capabilities and limitations, while the current political structure provides for diverse needs and expectations of the president. The dilemma in which Lincoln found himself likely existed long before his time and will likely remain an integral part of the American political system as long as the presidency continues to exist.

After the Civil War, the presidency resumed its prior status as an institution of the people but which did not directly communicate with them. Lincoln's rhetorical approach had been necessitated by the gravity of the era, and once the crisis had ended, the president's emergency powers (informal as well as formal) dissipated. Indeed, throughout his presidency Lincoln abstained from discussing all but the most crucial political matters, and Andrew Johnson was impeached for, among other offenses, "bad rhetoric."⁸ The necessity of what could be termed "good rhetoric" would not return for almost four decades, during which

⁶ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Deeds Done in Words* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1990) 1-13.

⁷ Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Vintage, 1948) 128.

⁸ Jeffrey Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 91.

presidents followed Washington's precedent of distance from the people. Theodore Roosevelt reversed this trend, although he, like Lincoln had years before, justified his speeches by extrapolating from the political beliefs of the Founders:

If popular rhetoric was proscribed in the nineteenth century because it could manifest demagoguery, impede deliberation, and subvert the routines of republican governance, it could be defended by showing itself necessary to contend with these very same political difficulties. Appealing to the founders' general arguments while abandoning some of their concrete practices, Roosevelt's presidency constituted a middle way between the statecraft of the preceding century and the rhetorical presidency that was to follow.⁹

Theodore Roosevelt was thus the first president to rely on swaying popular sentiment when he failed to convince Congress. Although this use of the "bully pulpit" only met with great success on one occasion (the passage of the Hepburn Act), Roosevelt nevertheless contributed to the shift from congressional domination of legislative matters to a system wherein the president has both direct and indirect influence. In 1913, when Woodrow Wilson decided to *read* his Annual Message to the Congress (instead of delivering it in writing), he simultaneously broke a 113-year tradition and introduced the notion that presidential oratory could be as benign as writing a statement or article. Indeed, Wilson's expertise before attaining the presidency had been as a writer and a professor, and his scholarly conception of presidential powers and limitations led him to reinvent the institution upon his election to it. Soon thereafter, because of the Depression and then World War II, Franklin Roosevelt was able to put into practice the framework Wilson had established.¹⁰ These men, as well as all most American presidents since their time, nevertheless met with resistance to this extraconstitutional power of the president—a power Theodore Roosevelt had so long ago reconciled with the spirit of the Constitution.

Political scientists Thomas E. Cronin and Michael A. Genovese explore the contradictory nature of the presidency in their 1998 book *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency*, which examines the office from the perspective of those questions that cannot be answered. In broad terms, these paradoxes encompass all areas of the presidential office and the study thereof; many of these paradoxes can also be applied to various specific aspects of the presidency and seem to pertain particularly well to the president's words to his country.

⁹ Tulis 95.

¹⁰ Carol Gelderman, *All the Presidents' Words* (New York: Walker and Co., 1997) 1-7.

Indeed, a similar study of this subject could serve to illuminate particularly problematic elements of rhetoric as well as those common to all aspects of the modern presidency. The authors' first paradox asserts that "Americans demand powerful . . . presidential leadership that solves the nation's problems. Yet we are inherently suspicious of strong centralized leadership and the abuse of power. Thus we place significant limits on the president's powers."¹¹ This statement demonstrates the fundamental differences between the prevailing political atmosphere and the constructs established in the Constitution. According to Cronin and Genovese, this contrast is largely responsible for the contradictory nature of the presidency. Another paradox, which depends to a certain degree on such contradictions, is identified by the authors as follows: "We yearn for the democratic 'common person' and simultaneously a leader who is uncommon, charismatic, heroic, and visionary."¹² With a glorified history of the Founding and other pivotal eras passed down in schools and sustained through popular culture, Americans compare their present-day leaders to an image of greatness that may never have existed. When presidents attempt to portray themselves as "uncommon, charismatic, heroic, and visionary," especially through speeches and public appearances, they almost certainly fail, and in the process they often alienate their constituents. Because presidents continue to aspire simultaneously to both extremes, citizens continue to be disappointed on both counts.

Next, Cronin and Genovese identify a paradox that seems to address common criticisms of political rhetoric: "We want a president who can unify diverse people and interests; however, the job requires taking firm stands, making unpopular or controversial decisions that necessarily upset and divide."¹³ Presidents are so concerned with portraying themselves as charismatic and visionary, as discussed above, that they often neither unify the people nor take a firm stand on any issue. Presidential rhetoric scholars Campbell and Jamieson have identified the generic elements of the various kinds of presidential speeches. In most genres, one of the main goals is indeed to unify the audience, yet presidents generally attempt to do so simply by reminding each American listener that he is, in fact, American; such attempts to unify the audience are most often through appeals to patriotism,¹⁴ which tend to evoke allegiance to the abstract notion of the nation more than to its people or institutions.

¹¹ Thomas E. Cronin and Michael A. Genovese, *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 4.

¹² Cronin and Genovese 4.

¹³ Cronin and Genovese 4.

Any rhetorical attempt to unify the audience requires that the president remain in the realm of abstract concepts, for he does not wish to offend any segment of this newly unified population by discussion of practical matters on which people may disagree. Furthermore, the most obvious instances of unifying the audience—often during inaugural addresses—are among the most publicly viewed addresses, and with such large numbers of listeners on both sides of every issue, these occasions are clearly not the time to risk alienating various constituencies. Essentially, the strategy that aims to compensate for public apathy (caused, in part, by speeches devoid of real content) ultimately contributes to an increased sense of disgust with elected officials. From this perspective, it is not difficult to understand that many of the problems facing the presidency itself also plague presidential rhetoric; because expectations of and limitations on the presidency directly impact the ways in which the president interacts with his constituents, the two are clearly inseparable in any study of rhetoric.

Cronin and Genovese discuss three more paradoxes of the presidency with obvious parallels to rhetoric:

- Americans want powerful, self-confident presidential leadership. Yet we are inherently suspicious of leaders who view themselves as infallible and above criticism.
- We admire the “above politics” nonpartisan or bipartisan approach, and yet the presidency is perhaps the most political office in the American system, which requires a creative entrepreneurial master politician.
- What it takes to become president may not be what is needed to govern the nation.¹⁵

These statements all suggest the fine lines presidents and presidential candidates must walk in their addresses. Americans want their president to address them in a nonpartisan way, even though we know the president is quite partisan. Moreover, when a president’s actions are obviously partisan, many of his supporters do not perceive his words or actions to be in support of their party—he is merely acting in accord with what constitutes political reality for them; the president’s political opponents, on the other hand, readily identify almost anything he says as “partisan.” Last, “what it takes to become president” is described by Cronin and Genovese as those skills associated, often cynically, with campaigning: fundraising and rhetorical abilities, for instance. While Americans are certain that these abilities are not “what

¹⁴ Campbell and Jamieson 15.

¹⁵ Cronin and Genovese 4.

is needed to govern the nation,” in most cases they cannot identify what *is* needed. Part of the difficulty in ascertaining precisely what the president should or must do may result from the fact that what is meant today by the word “president,” which used to refer only to one individual, is actually an administration of thousands of people whose specific expertise in various areas relieve the president himself of the responsibility of having or developing his own aptitude in these areas. The “president” as the individual whose name lives on in posterity has essentially become a figurehead for the executive branch of the government, yet more than two hundred years of history continue to dictate who the president should be and what he should do.

A further potential point of contention when discussing presidential rhetoric is the use of speechwriters. The American people, already largely unimpressed with the quality of their political leaders, believe that the fact that presidents are not the authors of their own speeches is still more proof that these leaders are merely attempting to appease or entertain their audiences. Indeed, as with most other areas of the presidential office, members of the staff do contribute to speeches, but only in this instance does the public seem to take issue with the president’s seeking assistance with his job. It only seems natural that he would consult Middle Eastern policy experts when a crisis arises with Iraq, and the same should be true when he must address the people. Moreover, as Jeffrey Tulis, author of *The Rhetorical Presidency*, has pointed out, even George Washington enlisted the help of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, among others, in drafting speeches.¹⁶ Thus, the practice itself is neither new nor inherently damaging to the political process, and it will not be a focal point in this examination of the president’s words.

Instead, this study will concern itself primarily with the ways in which various constitutional, political, and cultural constructs of the presidency have influenced modern rhetoric. An additional paradox—specific to the rhetorical presidency—might illuminate some of the issues in question: As representatives of the entire nation, twentieth-century presidents are expected to address their constituents frequently and always with brilliant insight, yet unless there exists an important issue on which they are to speak, their discourse is interpreted as empty and unimportant, or even as mere pandering. These expectations are largely a product of the Depression, World War I, and the Cold War, all of which arose in such quick

¹⁶ Tulis 184.

succession and lasted for so long that the crisis rhetoric characteristic of these eras has become the standard for presidential leadership. An analysis of the constitutional framework within which the president must govern shows that the Framers neither desired nor anticipated this kind of contact between the president and the people, yet factors such as the Cold War and the increasing presence of the media have had an irreversible effect on the relationship among the branches of government and between the government and the people.

This study, then, will attempt to harmonize divergent perspectives on the nature of presidential rhetoric and to identify those aspects that cannot be reconciled. Within the context of political science's goal of maintaining and improving Americans' relationship with the political process as a whole, an examination of classical and traditional standards of rhetoric will reveal the precise failings of modern American rhetoric. An analysis of individual speeches since Franklin Roosevelt will follow (in the interest of brevity, the administrations of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter will only be evaluated in the context of the bridge they formed between Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974 and the beginning of Ronald Reagan's administration), incorporating literature on both rhetoric and the presidency to decipher the goals, intentions, and strategies of the speeches. A synthesis of these purposes and outcomes will surely suggest conclusions about the present status and future prospects of American presidential rhetoric.

I. CLASSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN RHETORIC:

ASSESSING THE WORDS OF THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT

The use of rhetoric toward political ends is not a recent innovation, nor is it a uniquely American practice. As Robert L. Scott, co-author of *Moments in the Rhetoric of the Cold War*, observed, “Rhetoric should be assessed. How does one go about such a task? There is no short, simple answer to that question, since rhetoric is a multifaceted tradition rather than a single agreed-upon method. Descriptions, advice, and examples sprawl over 2,500 years of Western culture.”¹ The word “rhetoric” comes from the Greek *rhetorike* and was originally used only to refer to spoken language; its application to writing, as well as the negative connotations associated with the word, are relatively recent developments. Over the course of the last two-and-a-half millennia, philosophers, writers, and politicians (most notably Aristotle and Cicero) have recorded their observations on rhetoric, making valuable, lasting contributions to modern rhetorical scholarship. In evaluating contemporary rhetoric, including presidential discourse, an examination of these resources can provide significant insight into the timeless aspects of rhetoric—those which are as necessary in the effective use of rhetoric today as they were centuries ago. Such analysis can lend structure and an absolute base of criteria by which to compare the diverse body of American presidential speeches delivered since the start of the “modern era” of this country.

The advent of democratic governments in Greece in the fifth century B.C. necessitated the study of rhetoric in order for citizens to be able to contribute to the governance of their cities.² By the middle of the fourth century B.C., Aristotle had systematically recorded his observations about the discipline in the form of lecture notes; this compilation of writing became known as his *Rhetoric*. In this book, Aristotle stresses the relation between rhetoric and politics when he defines rhetoric as “a certain kind of offshoot [*paraphues*] of dialectic and of ethical studies (which it is just to call politics).”³ He begins by defining rhetoric as “an ability, in each case, to see the available means of persuasion”;⁴ in this way, he distinguishes rhetoric from its counterpart, dialectic, or the art of logical argument. He asserts that both of

¹ Robert L. Scott, *Cold War Rhetoric*, ed. Martin Medhurst (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1997) 7-8.

² George A. Kennedy, introduction, *On Rhetoric*, by Aristotle (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) vii.

³ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 1.2.7

these elements are merely tools with which one can discuss other, more substantive disciplines.⁵ The means of persuasion to which Aristotle refers include *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*;⁶ the ideal speaking situation would thus be one in which the speaker was able to incorporate all three of these elements into his address.

Ethos relies on a speaker's ability to present himself through the speech as being of high moral character:

[There is persuasion] through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly on all subjects and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt. And this should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person.⁷

In today's American political environment, however, this approach is becoming increasingly difficult to employ, as Americans' apathy toward politics becomes more widespread. Even among those who continue to have faith in the system, the idea that politicians are largely corrupt and self-interested prevails. Politicians must therefore exercise caution in attempting to portray themselves as being men or women of character, lest their constituents accuse them of merely trying to pander to them with blatant lies. While an established political leader may be able to use ethical appeals in public addresses, a lesser known politician or one with popularly recognized transgressions likely cannot. Further, because of modern technology such as television, members of any political leader's audience usually have preconceptions about the character of the speaker before entering into the rhetorical situation.

Next, *pathos* is the effort of the speaker to appeal to the listeners' emotions in a manner consistent with the aims of the speech.⁸ In this case, the listeners themselves contribute to the impact of the speech, adding an element of persuasion upon hearing the words. For example, when a speaker asserts that children's lives will be jeopardized if a certain action is or is not taken, he knows that the people's emotional response automatically makes this statement more effective. Aristotle addresses the following pairs of emotions a speaker may need to arouse in his listeners: anger or calmness, amiability or enmity, fear or confidence, shame or

⁴Aristotle *On Rhetoric* 1.2.1

⁵Aristotle 1.1.1

⁶Aristotle 1.2.3-5

⁷Aristotle 1.2.4

⁸Aristotle 1.2.5

shamelessness, kindness or unkindness, pity or indignation, and envy or emulation;⁹ this method is often utilized by political leaders in addresses to the people because it requires no background knowledge of the subject to be effective.

Last, *logos* is the use of formal logical arguments, such as induction or syllogisms, to “show the truth or apparent truth from whatever is persuasive in each case.”¹⁰ This method of persuasion is common among legislators, who can assume that their audience (other members of Congress and governmental leaders) is sufficiently educated about the issues to follow a logical argument. Additionally, since many of those involved in the legislative process are or have been attorneys, their educational backgrounds are most conducive to this type of appeal.

These three means of persuasion, Aristotle explains, are exercised through the following kinds of speeches: *symbolentikon* (deliberative, or that of lawmakers working to enact or defeat legislation), *dikanikon* (judicial, or that which occurs in law courts and consists of either accusation or defense), and *epideiktikon* (ceremonial, or that which aims either to praise or to blame).¹¹ In the context of political leadership, only deliberative and epideictic rhetoric are generally employed (although the three types, taken together, suggest the importance of considering one’s audience and particular circumstances). Inaugural addresses are a prime example of ceremonial rhetoric; most exceptional speeches, such as the Truman Doctrine address, are deliberative in that they urge the people to support policies the president is pursuing; and the state of the union, prescribed in the Constitution as an annual report to Congress, is an example of the hybrid deliberative-epideictic speech that has resulted from politicians’ need to use every opportunity for political gains. Moreover, the American president’s role as both head of state and head of government, unlike many systems in which these duties are separated and performed by two leaders, is especially conducive to addresses that seem ceremonial in objective but are noticeably policy-oriented; a president must always have political goals in mind, and praising others is often an attempt to convince the people of his own character.

In deliberative rhetoric, Aristotle writes, the political topics “on which people deliberate and on which deliberative orators give advice in public are mostly five in number, and these are finances, war and peace, national defense, imports and exports, and the framing

⁹Aristotle 2.2.1-11.1

¹⁰Aristotle 1.2.6

¹¹Aristotle 1.3.3

of laws.”¹² A qualified speaker on any of these five topics would necessarily be well versed in the particulars of his subject. Likewise, in ethical terms, in a deliberative speech the orator must also have an understanding of the objectives of any political action that could be taken: “Both to an individual privately and to all people generally there is one goal at which they aim in what they choose to do and in what they avoid. Summarily stated, this is happiness and its parts.”¹³ Because all people strive for happiness, increasing the people’s happiness must logically be the primary goal of any ethical legislator in his deliberative efforts. Aristotle examines the varieties of happiness, concluding that it can consist of anything from good birth and numerous children to beauty and good luck. Thus, a deliberative orator is capable of discussing the political measures he wishes to take as well as the effect it will have on his constituents, whose fundamental goals are identical even if their intermediate aspirations differ.

Epideictic rhetoric, like deliberative, necessitates a specific knowledge of certain topics. In this case, virtue and vice are the fundamental concepts for the speaker to understand because the purpose of ceremonial speech is, quite simply, to praise or to condemn. In a laudatory speech, Aristotle cites the useful virtues with which an epideictic speaker should be familiar, in order from most virtuous: justice, courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, and wisdom. Because he defines virtue as the ability to do good, a person having the ability to do more good for more people is inherently more virtuous.¹⁴ By Aristotle’s logic, then, the amount of praise or blame bestowed upon the subject of an epideictic address is dependent on the amount of virtue or vice he possesses. Today, however, while blame may be assigned according to the vices a person has displayed, laudatory addresses often vary according to the circumstances surrounding the person. If someone of average virtuousness is killed in a tragic accident, he will be more highly eulogized than a similar person who died naturally. Likewise, dying before “one’s time” in a very publicized incident makes a person the ideal subject of an epideictic speech by political leaders. Such speakers, it seems, use “ceremonial” speaking engagements as additional opportunities to persuade their audiences that they are sincere, moral leaders and thus, their policies must also be for the good of all.

¹²Aristotle 1.4.7

¹³Aristotle 1.5.1

¹⁴Aristotle 1.9.1-6

If the lines among the types of rhetoric observed by Aristotle have been blurred since the fourth century B.C., the strategies employed toward the various rhetorical objectives have also been modified by modern orators. A major difference between Aristotle's time and the present is derived from the technological advances of this century, because of which it is difficult for any political leader truly to edify the populace; there is little he can tell them that they do not already know through other sources. The ever-increasing influence of the media on all aspects of American political culture will continue to distort the relationship between a leader and his constituents from its status in the ancient world.

In order to have the desired effect on his audience, Aristotle believed, a speaker must recognize the following truth about rhetoric:

There are three reasons why speakers themselves are persuasive; for there are three things we trust other than logical demonstrations. These are practical wisdom [*phronesis*] and virtue [*arete*] and good will [*eunoia*]; for speakers make mistakes in what they say or advise through [failure to exhibit] either all of one of these; for either through lack of practical sense they do not form opinions rightly; or through forming opinions rightly they do not say what they think because of a bad character; or they are prudent and fair-minded but lack good will, so that it is possible for people not to give the best advice although they know [what] it [is]. These are the only possibilities.¹⁵

A speaker in ancient Greece would establish his credibility in the same way that he might use *ethos* and *pathos* toward any other objective, for practical wisdom and virtue are aspects of character and good will is a component of *pathos*.¹⁶ Again, as the people's sense of political apathy and cynicism grows, politicians meet more obstacles in establishing their trustworthiness in the eyes of their constituents; often, attempts by modern political leaders to demonstrate their character are interpreted as shameless pandering.

Aristotle then further explores the emotions he deems useful to the speaker, for only through knowing how to use words to affect the audience can he be truly effective in most rhetorical endeavors. Depending on the situation, Aristotle has already explained, the speaker might wish to evoke any of a range of positive or negative emotions from his audience, and he must have some psychological understanding of these emotions, their effect on listeners, and how to elicit the appropriate emotional response for the occasion.¹⁷ Likewise, the speaker

¹⁵ Aristotle 2.1.5-6

¹⁶ Aristotle 2.1.7

¹⁷ Aristotle 2.2.1-11.1

must have an understanding of the character of his audience in order to know how best to appeal to them in a speech. Thus, he must also study the ways in which youth, old age, middle age, good birth, wealth, and power (or a lack of these things) affect the audience's reception of its speaker's words.¹⁸

The last section of Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric addresses the form in which a speech is delivered to the audience, including *lexis* ("the way of saying something"—both through diction and style) and *taxis* ("arrangement," or organizational considerations). The "virtue of good prose style," as he calls it, is a result of clarity, although with regard to word choice, he claims that "to deviate [from prevailing usage] makes language seem more elevated; for people feel the same in regard to *lexis* as they do in regard to strangers compared with citizens. As a result, one should make the language unfamiliar, for people are admirers of what is far off, and what is marvelous is sweet."¹⁹ He also states that speeches should be written so as to seem natural when presented because audiences become resentful if they sense the artificial or manipulative nature of discourse. Also included in the category of style is the use of metaphors and sonorous words and phrases, which add an aesthetic quality to the words being presented.²⁰

Throughout his treatment of stylistic considerations of rhetoric, Aristotle likens artistic prose to poetry, implying that the distinction between these two genres should not be disturbed. Poetry, he says, is clearly artificial, and the more painstakingly composed it seems, the better it is received by its audience, while prose speech, regardless of the specific circumstances, should always seem spontaneous and natural in order not to alienate the audience, who wishes to believe they are being spoken to frankly. Aristotle expands on this belief by stating that "The form of the language should be neither metrical nor unrhythmical. The former is unpersuasive (for it seems to have been shaped), and at the same time it also diverts attention; for it causes [the listener] to pay attention to when the same foot will come again."²¹ Speech should, however, have some sort of rhythm to contribute limits that would otherwise not exist. In Greek times, as today, a heavy-handed, overly contrived address would

¹⁸ Aristotle 2.12.1-17.6

¹⁹ Aristotle 3.2.1

²⁰ Aristotle 3.2.4-15

²¹ Aristotle 3.8.1

seem to the audience more a performance than a persuasive attempt and thus was one of the primary stylistic errors to avoid.

Another consideration is what Aristotle describes as proportion: “The *lexis* will be appropriate if it expresses emotion and character and is proportional to the subject matter. Proportion exists if there is neither discussion of weighty matters in a casual way nor shoddy things solemnly”²² In this way, the tone of the discourse should correspond with its subject, so that even if a speaker is known for having a certain style when speaking of happy things, he must change his tone when discussing unhappy things to lend credibility to his words; otherwise, the audience may encounter difficulty in reconciling what it is hearing with how it is being presented.

Taxis, or the arrangement of a speech, varies depending on the precise circumstances, but every spoken address has two necessary parts:

[F]or it is necessary [first] to state the subject and [then] to demonstrate it. It is ineffective, after stating something, not to demonstrate it and to demonstrate without a first statement; for one demonstrating, demonstrates *something*, and one making a preliminary statement says it first for the sake of demonstrating it. Of these parts, the first is the statement [*prothesis*], the other the proof [*pistis*], just as if one made the distinction that one part is the problem, the other the demonstration.²³

Refuting the claims of his contemporaries that speeches require a multitude of diverse parts, Aristotle states that the maximum number of parts of a speech is four: introduction, statement of proposition, proof, and summary conclusion. The introduction of an epideictic speech is a direct appeal to praise or blame of the subject of the speech, but the opening line of such an address may be directly related to the subject or unrelated, then tied together. Aristotle devotes little consideration to the introduction of a deliberative speech, but he says that it generally reminds the listeners of what they already know. He adds that there is often no need of such an introduction, except when not having one would seem careless.²⁴

Aristotle then discusses the role of narration throughout speeches. In epideictic rhetoric, narrative is used to explain the events that support the speaker’s argument that the subject of the speech is either commendable or the opposite. Because of the nature of this kind of address, narrative is used throughout epideictic speeches, supporting the various points the

²² Aristotle 3.7.1-2

²³ Aristotle 3.13.1-2

speaker makes and demonstrating exactly how the person's actions in a given situation make him deserving of the praise or blame being bestowed upon him. When the audience already knows of the actions being evoked in the speech, the speaker does not need to describe them in such detail but merely remind his listeners of the person's involvement in them; when a situation is unknown to the audience, more narration is needed to advance the speaker's argument.²⁵ Deliberative narrative is uncommon, but when used, it generally reminds the audience of the past with or without the policy he is supporting or opposing in order to persuade listeners that their best interests are indeed being served by the speaker.²⁶

The use of proof in oration, Aristotle writes, is a complicated matter because speakers invariably want to support their arguments as well as possible, and it is impossible to be sure that all proofs used derive from fact. In epideictic speeches, for instance, praise and blame are often exaggerated to serve the purposes of the speaker, and in deliberative addresses, speakers may take the liberty of forecasting unknown outcomes. Therefore, the audience cannot assume that "proof" cited in a speech actually proves anything (and should actually search for inconsistencies or falsifications in the argument), which renders the speaker's duty more difficult because he must often overcome the skepticism of his audience. Aristotle suggests that proofs through paradigms, or examples, are the most appropriate to deliberative oratory (which draws from the past to predict the future).²⁷

According to Aristotle, the conclusions of all speeches are made up of the following elements: "disposing the hearer favorably toward the speaker and unfavorably toward the opponent; amplifying and minimizing; moving the hearer into emotional reactions [*pathe*]; and [giving] a reminder [of the chief points made in the speech]."²⁸ By attending to these four areas, the speaker uses what he had already said, as well as what the audience already knows, and manipulates it one final time to leave his listeners with exactly the impression he wishes them to take away from the speech.

This manipulation of facts, proof, and the audience itself suggests that Aristotle's statement about rhetoric's including an ethical component does not hold true unless the speaker is a good person and his motivations for speaking are truly just. In a 1980 *Philosophy*

²⁴ Aristotle 3.13.4-14.11

²⁵ Aristotle 3.16.1-3

²⁶ Aristotle 3.16.11

²⁷ Aristotle 3.17.1-5

and *Rhetoric* article, Christopher Lyle Johnstone argued for what he termed a “unifying vision of the arts of ethics, politics, and rhetoric”; Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* are essential supplements to the *Rhetoric* and should be considered as such.²⁹ Nevertheless, in an imperfect world, filled with imperfect people, one must always exercise caution when listening to a speech, for the speaker likely has used certain rhetorical devices to strengthen his points, and it is nearly impossible to discern whether a speaker’s means—or his end—are as he claims they are.

Three centuries after Aristotle completed his *Rhetoric*, Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote an updated treatise on rhetoric for the Roman people. In *De Oratore*, which took the form of a series of fairly inconclusive dialogues, he focused less on the technical aspects of rhetoric—which he had already addressed in other works—and instead concentrated on “the character of the orator,” which constituted the book’s subtitle. With regard to the orator’s “supremacy of idea over delivery,”³⁰ Cicero sought to determine which qualities are necessary, desirable, or undesirable in a speaker, and he noted again and again that one cannot possibly speak eloquently on a subject about which he knows nothing. Cicero, himself an accomplished rhetor, thus contemplates why there are so few competent orators in his society:

A knowledge of a vast number of things is necessary, without which volubility of words is empty and ridiculous; speech itself is to be formed, not merely by choice, but by careful construction of words; and all the emotions of the mind, which nature has given to man, must be intimately known; for all the force and art of speaking must be employed in allaying or exciting the feelings of those who listen. To this must be added a certain portion of grace and wit, learning worthy of a well-bred man, and quickness and brevity in replying as well as attacking, accompanied with a refined decorum and urbanity. Besides, the whole of antiquity and a multitude of examples is to be kept in the memory; nor is the knowledge of laws in general, or of the civil law in particular, to be neglected. . .
 „³¹

Cicero argues that any man who attempts to speak on subjects with which he is unfamiliar (as often occurs in modern political contexts) will lack the passion necessary for a successful

²⁸ Aristotle 3.19.1

²⁹ Christopher Lyle Johnstone, “An Aristotelian Trilogy: Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, and the Search for Moral Truth,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 13 (1980): 1-24.

³⁰ Ralph A. Micken, introduction to *Cicero on Oratory and Orators* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1970) xliii.

³¹ Cicero, *On Oratory and Orators* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1970) I iv.

speech and will ultimately fail in his rhetorical task. While it may be possible for a politician to become well versed in a variety of policy areas, if he tries simply to recite words written by another, his ineptitude will be reflected in the address. In order to be a competent speaker, one “must be a philosopher-statesman-orator,”³² understanding virtually all fields of knowledge.

Moreover, Cicero’s characters argue that a speaker who does not truly possess the emotions he wishes to evoke in his audience will not deliver a compelling address. Antonius, one of Cicero’s characters, recalls his defense of another Roman whose suffering brought visible sadness to Antonius during the defense:

“This excitement of compassion, this adjuration of all gods and men, of citizens and allies, was not unaccompanied by my tears and extreme commiseration on my part; and if, from all the expressions which I used, real concern of my own had been absent, my speech would not only have failed to excite commiseration, but would have even deserved ridicule. I therefore instruct you in these particular, Sulpicius, I that am, forsooth, so skillful and so learned a master, showing you how, in speaking, you may be angry, and sorrowful, and weep.”³³

In order to elicit certain emotions from his listeners, Aristotle has said that the speaker must know how to manipulate his words, but Cicero adds that the speaker must himself express these emotions in order to inspire the audience.

Contemplating this notion from an often cynical twentieth century perspective, one naturally imagines that Cicero is suggesting that orators must be actors, not only uttering lines composed by a playwright but feigning emotions as designated by a director. This was clearly not Cicero’s intention; he intended the ideal speaker to strive toward a higher purpose in his rhetorical task. Indeed, Cicero referred to the ability to speak as

that single excellence by which they [humans] claim their superiority over brutes[.] But, that we may notice the most important point of all, what other power could either have assembled mankind, when dispersed, into one place, or have brought them from wild and savage life to the present humane and civilized state of society; or, when cities were established, have described for them laws, judicial institutions, and rights? And that I may not mention more examples, which are almost without number, I will conclude the subject in one short sentence; for I consider, that by the judgment and wisdom of the perfect orator, not only his own honor, but that of many other individuals, and the welfare of the whole state, are principally upheld.”³⁴

³² Micken xxxvi.

³³ Cicero *On Oratory and Orators* II xlvii.

³⁴ Cicero I iii.

While Aristotle never specifically stated this opinion, he implied that a sense of ethical values and concern for the common interest are necessary for a successful speaker, for success includes not only the ability to achieve one's goals through a speech but also to attain some absolute good—in terms of politics, the good of the entire society. Cicero, too, recognized the importance of virtue in an orator; without such “judgment and wisdom,” even if the speaker attains all of his personal goals in an address, the speech has not achieved one of the fundamental ends of all rhetoric, which is identical to the fundamental aim of traditional political science: the welfare of the state. Quintilian, who wrote his *Institutio Oratoria* about one century after Cicero's *De Oratore*, also stated that orators must be virtuous, honest men but acknowledges that there are certain occasions on which they simply must bend the truth or conceal certain facts in order to protect the greater good.³⁵

Ultimately, the means of arousing the audience include such subjective means as emotional appeals on the one hand and the use of pure facts on the other. Cicero explains that “for the purpose of proof, two kinds of matter present themselves to the orator,” and he describes them as follows:

one, consisting of such things as are not invented by him, but, as appertaining to the cause, are judiciously treated by him, as deeds, testimonies, covenants, contracts, examinations, laws, acts of the senate, precedents, decrees, opinions of lawyers, and whatever else is not found out by the orator, but brought under his notice by the cause and his clients; the other, consisting entirely in the orator's own reasoning and arguments ³⁶

Although Cicero is primarily addressing judicial discourse in this passage, it is equally applicable to all other kinds of rhetoric as well. Using the documents and hard facts he is given, any speaker, regardless of the context, attempts to put together a logical, convincing, and credible argument to serve his goals. In the American presidential context, this process has clearly manifested itself; currently, the process of drafting a speech incorporates input by policy experts as well as more creative contributions by journalists, poets, and others who aim to lend the speech a sense of fluidity and harmony.

If one considers Aristotle's technical treatment of rhetoric in conjunction with Cicero's study of the characteristics of the perfect orator, it becomes clear that a successful speaker

³⁵ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968) XII i 36.

³⁶ Cicero II xxviii.

must study the technical aspects of rhetoric as well as other subjects such as politics, philosophy, language, and history. He must also possess the entire range of emotions that he may wish to inspire through his address. Moreover, perhaps as a result of his philosophical training, he must know how to combine documents and facts around him—as well as his own personal abilities—into a cogent format capable of persuasion. Last, and often the most difficult, he needs a sense of personal and civic virtue in order for his objectives to be worth promoting.

The context of American politics has shown that it is possible for a speaker to possess all of these qualities and still be a rhetorical failure at times. This is perhaps because of one final quality most successful orators exhibit—and one on which many modern speakers are overly dependent. Cicero describes this attribute as that which will “discriminate the fertility and copiousness of speech . . . from the barrenness of those who use not this variety and elegance of phrase. . . . One thing there will certainly be, which those who speak well will exhibit as their own; a graceful and elegant style, distinguished by a particular artifice and style.”³⁷ Cicero, like Aristotle, viewed this “elegance of phrase” as a supplementary element of rhetoric, merely contributing to speeches without detracting from them when it was not present.

John Quincy Adams, assessing political rhetoric from an early-nineteenth century perspective in a series of lectures delivered at Harvard University, noted that eloquence is not simply an extra flourish used by some speakers but instead a potentially dangerous element of rhetoric. In his second lecture, which he titled “Objections Against Eloquence Considered,” he observed that “Like all other gifts of Providence, eloquence is, according to the manner, in which it is applied, a blessing or a curse, the pest of nations, or the benefactress of human kind.”³⁸ Having seen the beginning of American political rhetoric’s increasing emphasis on eloquence over all other factors, Adams feared that speakers would come to depend solely on it and cease their studies of the discipline in its entirety. Demagoguery, a concern of all respectable early American leaders, could result out of harmful intentions couched in pretty language. Another danger, perhaps unforeseen by Adams, is that eloquence of articulation has become the standard among American presidents, and the other elements—technical

³⁷ Cicero I xii.

³⁸ John Quincy Adams, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962) 65.

competence, understanding of the speech's subject as well as general knowledge, emotional investment in his words, effective incorporation of supporting materials, and a sense of civic virtue—have often been relegated to the status of optional flourishes. Even when a president possesses and displays all of these abilities in a speech, his listeners discern only the eloquence (the most immediately evident aspect of any speech, just as bad grammar is the most visible aspect of a piece of writing) and denounce the “empty rhetoric” of their principal political figure. From this point, it is not difficult to attack all politicians and politics as a whole. Adams recognized the importance of balance above any single ingredient in rhetoric, and he wished to reinforce in his audience that there exists no magic formula for successful oratory; one must simply study the discipline in all its parts, much as one studies philosophy, and use the proper combination of elements as each occasion demands.

Thus, after considering the insights of Aristotle, Cicero, and other rhetorical thinkers, it is clear only that there are no absolute guidelines—much less rules—for students of rhetoric to follow (and surely American presidents, delivering hundreds of speeches each year, should be considered students of rhetoric). The 1999 textbook *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* defines rhetoric as “the art that helps people compose effective discourse.”³⁹ If effectiveness is accepted as the absolute objective of rhetoric, then it is necessary to prioritize those elements that make an address effective. In a democracy such as the United States, one goal of political discourse must be to contribute to citizens' sense of efficacy, political awareness, and pride in their political system. If this is indeed an intention of modern presidents, they have often failed in their rhetorical tasks. If it is not a primary goal, they have failed as well—but in this case, they have failed the political system and all its people. Thus, it may be that classical rhetoric, which suggests that the means justify the oratorical ends, has been misinterpreted to support politicians' desire to further their own personal causes instead of the best interests of the state. Ultimately, it is through this lens of maintaining an effective political system that presidential rhetoric must be examined; the specific strategies elaborated by Aristotle, Cicero, and other classical philosophers are merely tools toward this end.

Because the objectives of the ideal speaker are identical to those of the ideal leader, something can perhaps be learned from examining the criteria with which political scientists

³⁹ Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 375.

and citizens evaluate their presidents. Presidency scholars Cronin and Genovese have identified the following four factors: “the scope of the problems they faced; their efforts (actions) and intentions (vision) in dealing with these problems; what they were able to accomplish; and what the long-term results of their actions were.”⁴⁰ Adapted to address presidential discourse, “the scope of the problems they faced” would be essentially the same as the general problems facing the country, the administration, and the president himself. However, in the context of a president’s speeches to the public, the president is responsible not only for informing his constituents on how he is responding to a given situation but also, more fundamentally, for introducing the people to certain problems for the first time. In this way, a president can present issues in whatever light he chooses and can portray them in the way that would most positively affect how the people judge his treatment of them.

A president’s actions and vision with regard to the problems faced by his administration (excluding, of course, any legal issues that could be considered “self-inflicted,” such as Richard Nixon’s or Bill Clinton’s) are direct results of the problems themselves. For instance, a peacetime president can obviously never be remembered for ending a war, just as one who presided during a time of economic prosperity will only be remembered for the strong national economy if it improved dramatically while he was in office. Beyond these issues, however, presidents can distinguish themselves for enacting positive programs, but even programs such as the Great Society and the War on Drugs suggest that there was a problem that had simply been overlooked in the past. Rhetorically speaking, a president’s success in this respect depends on his addressing those concerned by the action (or plan) and informing them of his intentions. This category encompasses many aspects beyond the president’s words (indeed, it could include his ability to do what he has promised the people), and it is thus perhaps a less meaningful indicator of rhetorical performance than the other criteria.

What a president is able to accomplish in a rhetorical context seems to pertain most directly to his efforts to rally support for the political process in general. If his speeches lead to a sense of public apathy about or hostility toward the president and government as a whole, a president could be considered a rhetorical failure, for it is this legacy that he leaves for his successors. Rhetorically speaking, the long-term effects of a president’s actions are precisely this legacy, which can revive or undermine support for the American political system.

⁴⁰ Cronin and Genovese 88.

Thus, in order to apply Cronin and Genovese's criteria for presidential success to rhetoric, one must assume that an essential end of the presidential speech-making process is indeed reviving and sustaining popular support for all parts of the political process. As Aristotle, Cicero, and others implied, these ideals must be a guiding principle in evaluating the popular rhetoric of American presidents of the modern era.

II. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND *THE GENRES OF GOVERNANCE*

Scholars consider Franklin Delano Roosevelt the first president of the modern era of American politics for a variety of diverse reasons—but most simply because of sheer timing. The Depression, for instance, provided the occasion for a visionary president to act as a national savior. The emergent medium of radio allowed for inspirational rhetoric to sweep across the country via the airwaves. World War II begged for a wartime hero in the executive branch. Entering into office, Roosevelt was not guaranteed to meet any of these needs of the United States in the 1930s and 1940s—another Hoover could have failed on all counts—but somehow, this man’s vision and capabilities were precisely what the nation required to restore its quality of life and the presidency to its prior level of greatness. During FDR’s first presidential campaign, the people were seeking little more than the promise of real economic relief, and it was essentially this promise, as well as the reputation he had established as governor of New York, that won the election for him. Thus, at the time of his inauguration in 1933, he had the overwhelming support of the American people; it would have been nearly impossible for his first inaugural address to be a rhetorical failure. Indeed, this speech was celebrated at the time, but, moreover, it is still accepted as one of the most inspirational addresses of American history. It was also the first in a series of brilliantly crafted, effectively delivered speeches and marked the beginning of Franklin Roosevelt’s superlative presidency.

The Depression was clearly the kind of emergency whose gravity the American people had not witnessed since the Civil War. Lincoln’s greatness had emanated from his willingness to redefine the nation during that crisis; FDR, too, saw the necessity of redefinition: While his predecessor had been opposed to increased governmental involvement in national economic recovery, Roosevelt understood such a need. After presenting this viewpoint to the people during the presidential campaign of 1932, he deviated from presidential tradition and retained rhetorical ties with his constituents throughout the recovery and, ultimately, throughout his 13-year administration.

From this era have flowed dozens of theories and interpretations of the modern presidency and its rhetorical traditions. It would be erroneous, however, to assume that presidential rhetoric began with FDR. Indeed, inaugurals and state of the union addresses, as well as the lesser genres such as war rhetoric, have existed for roughly as long as the Union

itself. Nevertheless, this remarkable administration has sparked considerable presidential analysis, and this leader undeniably marks the beginning of the presidency's "modern era."

Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell identify the following distinct genres in presidential rhetoric in their book, *Deeds Done in Words: The Genres of Governance*: inaugural addresses, special "inaugurals" of ascendant vice-presidents, state of the union messages, veto messages, war rhetoric, two types of impeachment rhetoric, pardoning rhetoric, and farewell addresses (almost all presidents deliver inaugurals, state of the unions, and farewell addresses to the people; the other genres are restricted by necessity). Generic evaluation is essential to rhetorical analysis because different types of presidential address vary tremendously, and only by understanding the norms of distinct genres can one begin to discern the "normal" and unique elements of a given speech. While individual addresses may diverge from the standards described by the authors—sometimes to the detriment, sometimes to the benefit of the address—the requirements of each genre have been established by long-standing political traditions and must, to a certain degree, be respected. Through generic analysis, Jamieson and Campbell explain, "one can judge whether or not a given rhetorical act performed its functions and, by comparing it with other like acts, in some instances, one can assess how a given work transcended the customary and the cliché to achieve that end in an affecting and enduring way."¹

Inaugural addresses, as the first communication presidents have with their constituents after being elected, often serve as the last element of the campaign. Regardless of whether they accomplish this purpose, they ease the transition from the campaign to the president's administration, especially for new presidents. The genre achieves the following general objectives, as outlined by Jamieson and Campbell:

- (1) unifies the audience by reconstituting its members as the people, who can witness and ratify the ceremony; (2) rehearses communal values drawn from the past; (3) sets forth the political principles that will govern the new administration; and (4) demonstrates through enactment that the president appreciates the requirements and limitations of executive functions. Finally, (5) each of these ends must be achieved through means appropriate to epideictic address, that is, while urging contemplation not action, focusing on the present while incorporating past and future, and praising the institution of the presidency and the values and form of the government of which it is a part, a

¹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Deeds Done in Words* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1990) 13.

process through which the covenant between the president and the people is renewed.²

These requirements seem to indicate that Campbell and Jamieson assume the inaugural's only audience to be the American people; while this may traditionally have been the case, presidents have occasionally used this opportunity as a instrument for the pursuit of greater goals. Nevertheless, these five requirements are quite insightful within the scope of an inaugural's appeal to the American people.

FDR's inaugural addresses are a unique sample for analysis because of the simple fact that there are four of them. Spaced over twelve years and interspersed with dozens of other speeches, the inaugurals remain among his most celebrated. Although certain generic elements exist in most inaugurals (as discussed above), a number of variations depend on more precise circumstances surrounding an address. For instance, the generic requirement of recalling a common national past provides for some degree of continuity among inaugurals delivered under extremely diverse circumstances. A president's first inaugural generally surveys American history as a whole, focusing on its hardships and its successes, while the second inaugural is often limited in its scope to the four preceding years, emphasizing the highlights of the speaker's administration. In the case of FDR, whose first inaugural emphasized the struggles the country was facing at that time, the speech made only vague references to ways in which the nation had triumphed over adversity in the past. His second inaugural address more closely resembled other second inaugurals throughout history, emphasizing obstacles overcome by the people since he first took the oath of office. His third and fourth addresses, of course, have no other historical counterparts, and the unique nature of their situation at the beginning and the end of the Second World War provide for notable discourse by FDR. His third inaugural recounted the accomplishments of his first two terms, and only after verbally alleviating the hardships associated with the Great Depression did he introduce the notion that the United States might soon find itself at war to maintain the basic principles of democracy. The fourth inaugural, delivered only months before Roosevelt's death, seems to be a final attempt by the great leader to address his beloved nation and remind them once again of "America's purpose that we shall not fail."³ The precise circumstances of

² Campbell and Jamieson 15.

³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The Fourth Inaugural Address, January 20, 1945," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1944-45* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950) 523.

FDR's four inaugural addresses—the depths of the Great Depression, the midst of the nation's recovery, the beginning of WWII, and the end of the war, as well as the end of FDR's life—allowed Roosevelt to use the generic elements of inaugural addresses to the extent that they aided him in his rhetorical task but also permitted him to break free from them when necessary.

Roosevelt's initial inaugural address could be called the first modern presidential speech in American history. With this speech, FDR ushered in a new conception of the presidency as well as a restored understanding of the power of the president's words. Arguably, not since Lincoln's appearance at Gettysburg had a single address inspired the American people as this inaugural did, and after the dismal administration of Herbert Hoover, the nation was ready for strong leadership from the outset. As FDR said in the introduction of the address, "In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days."⁴ Roosevelt recognized and capitalized on this reality in the process of drafting the address, and in its distinction from inaugural addresses before it, FDR's first inaugural paved the way for a new era of presidential rhetoric.

With the assurance of the strong support by the majority of the people, Roosevelt felt confident addressing policy issues in his first public address since his election. Indeed, he went as far as to state that if "the normal balance of Executive and legislative authority" was not "wholly adequate to meet the unprecedented task" before the nation, he would "ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency." With these words, heralded by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* as "fighting words, fit for a time that calls for militant action,"⁵ he explicated his plans for implementing his New Deal policies. One of the generic elements of the inaugural address—indeed, an element that sets this type of presidential communication apart from all other forms—is that it concentrates on principles instead of on policies. In most inaugurals, the general guiding principles of the United States lead into the specific principles of a new

⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Random House, 1938) 11. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 11-16.

⁵ "Comment of Press on Roosevelt's Inaugural Address," *The New York Times* 5 March 1933: 6.

president's administration (although the resemblance between the two is often quite striking), and only after the president has been invested as the nation's primary political leader can he proceed to assert his authority on policy issues. According to generic norms, in the inauguration a president must focus on the Constitution and constitutional limitations on his power in order to assure the people that he is their servant.⁶ In Roosevelt's case, however, he believed that the people had already invested him with presidential authority; indeed, he was elected in large part on the premise that he would begin to remedy the nation's ills immediately. As the people had already begun to divide themselves by class, those who were suffering—those who had brought him into office—were impatiently awaiting the beginning of Roosevelt's promised remedy.

To this "host of unemployed citizens . . . and an equally great number [who] toil with little return," he offered a scapegoat in the form of "the rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods." In this way, the people, who had been confused and frustrated by the Depression, were allowed to shift much of their anger from themselves or their government and onto Wall Street. Roosevelt's listeners so readily accepted this scapegoat that they applauded nearly every line of the speech relating to limiting its power, beginning with a biblical allusion: "Yes, the money-changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths" (which, although it was more than one-fourth of the way into the address, received the first ovation⁷).

To wait one more day to begin explicating his policy initiatives to the people would have been unwise and would have proven inconsistent with the executive style he was about to introduce into the White House. Thus, Roosevelt's first inaugural address could be considered the exception that proves the rule: Roosevelt addressed every aspect of the New Deal that had been conceived of at that time,⁸ yet he presented each element of the plan in a way that could be interpreted as sustained attention to the principles on which the nation was founded:

We must frankly recognize the overbalance of population in our industrial centers and, by engaging on a national scale in a redistribution, endeavor to provide a better use of the land for those best fitted for the land. . . . Action in this image and to this end is feasible under the form of government which we have inherited from our ancestors. Our Constitution is so simple and practical

⁶ Campbell and Jamieson 14-36.

⁷ Halford Ryan, "President Franklin D. Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address, 1933," *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents*, ed. Halford Ryan (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993) 97.

⁸ Halford Ryan, *American Rhetoric from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1987) 7.

that it is possible always to meet extraordinary needs by changes in emphasis and arrangement without loss of essential form. That is why our constitutional system has proved itself the most superbly enduring political mechanism the modern world has produced.

The people heard the specific policy points as Roosevelt's solutions to the problems that plagued them, but even more, this speech reaffirmed the people's faith in the government to work for the common good. Moreover, using a military metaphor, he capitalized on his commander-in-chief role⁹ and launched what could be called the first "War on Poverty." Roosevelt began his first term by increasing the citizens' expectations, leaving himself no choice but to make his first hundred days measure up.

In concluding the address, Roosevelt reminded the people that "[w]e do not distrust the future of essential democracy." Using "we" to encompass himself and the people to whom he was speaking,¹⁰ he emphasized that his objectives were identical to theirs. Then, departing from the first person plural, he referred to the people, curiously, in the third person: "The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes." In the last line of the speech before the obligatory request for a blessing from above (which serves also as another way in which the president unifies the nation: before God¹¹), Roosevelt, having reminded the people that they ultimately possessed the power, said, "In the spirit of the gift I take it." In this way, he reinforced in the people the impression that he was entirely prepared to follow his constituents' wishes to restore balance to the nation.

The popular response to FDR's first inaugural address was, of course, very positive among those who supported him in the election (those who opposed him, primarily the wealthy he attacked in the speech, were only reaffirmed in their distrust). *The Nation* wrote an article entitled "The Faith of Roosevelt," which began, "On the very day which marked the ending of an epoch, President Roosevelt delivered his inaugural. Never in our national history has there been so dramatic a coincidence as this simultaneous transfer of power and the complete collapse of a system and of a philosophy."¹² *The Christian Century* described the

⁹ Ryan *American Rhetoric* 15-19.

¹⁰ Barbara Hinckley, *The Symbolic Presidency* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 39-42.

¹¹ Campbell and Kohrs 17-26.

¹² "The Faith of Roosevelt," *The Nation* 15 Mar. 1933: 278.

address as “a clear statement of the conditions of recovery in so far as these pertain to national morality and national morale.”¹³ *Newsweek* quoted significant portions of the speech, emphasizing what one writer called “an assault on the bankers, against whom the voices of the distressed are raised in an ever-swelling chorus as the depression endures.”¹⁴ Roosevelt’s words certainly contributed to the popular sentiment against bankers in the weeks and months following his inauguration, and the growing support of New Deal policies as well as its overarching philosophy marked only the beginning of what would become known as the modern era of the presidency.

Weighing the success of this address against the liberties Roosevelt took in its development clearly demonstrates that generic analysis is valuable only to the extent that it aids in classification and organization of speeches (but not necessarily as a means of evaluation). Examining FDR’s first inaugural address through the lens of Campbell and Jamieson’s criteria shows that it utterly failed to restrict itself to the confines of epideictic rhetoric in terms of merely contemplative discourse. Moreover, while Roosevelt acknowledged the great presidential duties he was assuming in March 1933, he ignored virtually all limitations, preferring instead to enter into office with the assumption of a popular mandate deriving less from the absolute number of citizens who voted for him than from the strength of their support. Thus, FDR began his presidency with the intention of overcoming (or simply continuing to ignore) these constitutional limitations while carrying out his presidential responsibilities. Nevertheless, this speech remains among the greatest in the United States’ political history, and a significant part of its greatness rests in its diversions from the generic norms.

When Roosevelt came before the people four years later to deliver his second inaugural, he was faced with the same potentially anti-climactic situation presidents before and since him have encountered; he summarized the ultimate purpose of the ceremony toward the end of the address in one sentence: “Today we *reconsecrate* our country to long-cherished ideals in a suddenly changed civilization [emphasis added].”¹⁵ Indeed, the only real function a second inauguration serves is to provide the president the occasion to renew the people’s pride

¹³ “The Inaugural Address,” *The Christian Century* 15 Mar. 1933: 351.

¹⁴ “Roosevelt Takes Oath in Crisis,” *Newsweek* 11 Mar. 1933: 9.

in their government and in their president—in essence, to “reconsecrate” the nation to its pre-established ideals. FDR chose to highlight morality as one of the ideals that would guide the nation as it continued to regain economic balance¹⁵: “We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we know now that it is bad economics.” By emphasizing the increasing morality of Americans, he was able simultaneously to rally support of the common people (who largely perceived themselves as moral) and also to suggest once again that he recognized Wall Street’s immorality as a demon to be averted as the American people strove toward a “morally better world.”

For Roosevelt, the opportunity to appear before the entire nation four years after first entering into office was especially valuable, as the challenges faced by his first administration had not yet been resolved by the beginning of his second. This address allowed Roosevelt to focus his constituents’ attention on the accomplishments of the last four years, as re-elected presidents invariably do in second inaugurals (“we have made the exercise of all power more democratic. . . . Our progress out of the depression is obvious”), while also providing him the opportunity to remind Americans that the struggle for economic and political freedom was far from over (“Dulled conscience, irresponsibility, and ruthless self-interest already reappear. Such symptoms of prosperity may become portents of disaster! Prosperity already tests the persistence of our progressive purpose”). Above all, FDR’s second inaugural aims to harness the people’s renewed sense of security as a means of reaffirming their commitment to the New Deal.

“Unification of the audience” as a generic element always seemed to come easily to Roosevelt. Because the nation was, as he described it in the first sentence of the second inaugural, “single-minded in anxiety” throughout most of his presidency, adversity unified the American people more than Roosevelt could through deliberate discourse; merely evoking their strife and their subsequent “action, tireless and unafraid” against “the stagnation and despair of that day” satisfied that requirement. Communal values, too, naturally flowed out of the nation’s recent past, as the struggle against poverty was not only pragmatic but ideological as well. During Roosevelt’s first two terms, desire for “the essential democracy of our nation

¹⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 1937,” *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Macmillan, 1941) 5. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 1-6.

¹⁶ Ryan *Inaugural Addresses* 109-10.

and the safety of our people”—a return to true democracy—was lauded as the only option for the future of the United States. The three remaining generic elements essentially followed Roosevelt’s trend, begun with his first inaugural, of ignoring any norms he found restrictive (in executing his presidential duties as well as in his speeches) and giving the people precisely what they required. This philosophy was clearly a lasting effect of Roosevelt’s first presidential campaign against Hoover and all that he represented in the eyes of the people.

After reminding the people of the circumstances under which they had convened four years earlier, Roosevelt returned to the same powerful rhetoric he had used at that time, again attacking the bankers and others deemed responsible for the economic depression. Because the primary criticism Roosevelt faced from these groups continued to concern his monarchical approach to New Deal legislation, he said that “four years of new experience have not belied our historic instinct. . . . Our tasks in the last four years did not force democracy to take a holiday.” For anyone who may have been convinced that Roosevelt’s economic recovery measures were unconstitutional, he wished to focus attention on the fact that they were, in fact, wholly consistent with the guiding principles of American democracy.

Toward the end of the address, in a manner reminiscent of his first inaugural, he recalled that very speech: “Let us ask again: Have we reached the goal of our vision of that fourth day of March 1933? Have we found our happy valley?” In answering this question for his audience, Roosevelt reported on the current state of the nation as he saw it:

I see a great nation, upon a great continent I see a United States which can demonstrate that, under democratic methods of government, national wealth can be translated into a spreading volume of human comforts hitherto unknown I see millions of families trying to live on incomes so meager that the pall of family disaster hangs over them day by day. . . . I see millions denied education, recreation, and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children. . . . I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.

This “I see” anaphora, ending with the perhaps exaggerated “one-third” statement, quickly became the most noteworthy passage of his speech, reminding the people that they still could not turn their backs on their fellow citizens.¹⁷ FDR concluded his address, and thus began his second term, by reminding the people that their futures were all irreversibly linked, and he again established his mandate by proclaiming to “assume the solemn obligation of leading the

¹⁷ Halford Ryan, *Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Rhetorical Presidency* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988) 88-89.

American people forward along the road over which they have chosen to advance.” Throughout this speech, FDR reminded the people of the distance they had come since March 1933, and in renewing their faith in his leadership, he assured them that under his guidance the nation would continue to recover and would once again prosper.

By the time of FDR’s third inaugural address, which he delivered as war raged in Europe, Americans no longer feared poverty and starvation as they once had, but a new, possibly more terrifying threat had arisen. As had been the case in his first inaugural, FDR capitalized on the dangers in his address. In fact, by this time, he had mastered the generic elements of inaugurals. Unification of the audience and recalling a common national past were succinctly accomplished in the first few lines of the speech: “On each national day of inauguration since 1789, the people have renewed their sense of dedication to the United States. In Washington’s day the task of the people was to create and weld together a nation. In Lincoln’s day the task of the people was to preserve that nation from disruption from within. In this day the task of the people is to save that nation and its institutions from disruption from without.”¹⁸ In these four simple sentences the President was able to remind his audience both of the most desperate times in national history and of the people’s desire throughout that history to come together toward the pursuit of common ideals. Throughout the brief speech, FDR mentioned some of these common ideals: “democracy,” “progress in the improvement of human life,” and “preservation of the sacred fire of liberty.” At a time when democracy as a political order seemed to be losing popularity around the world, the American people needed to be reminded that their system was not faltering. In support of this assertion, FDR recalled the Depression, which his administration had begun to remedy only eight years earlier. Since this time, he reminded the nation, the United States had been steadily gaining momentum. Using a very Rooseveltian anaphora of “We know it because . . .” sentences, he emphasized all the reasons for which he knew democracy was still a viable option, politically, intellectually, economically, and socially.

He then turned to a brilliant use of a rather mundane metaphor: “A nation, like a person, has a body . . .,” “A nation, like a person, has a mind . . .,” “And a nation, like a person, has something deeper . . .” Likening the United States to a human being, he

¹⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Third Inaugural Address, January 20, 1941,” *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950) 3. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 3-7.

illustrated the fragility of the nation, which must be cared for physically and intellectually in order to flourish. At the conclusion of this metaphor, he made reference to “a thing for which we find it difficult—even impossible—to hit upon a single, simple word.” After demonstrating his excellence as a president and as a speaker, he was now demonstrating the other side of the great leader/common man paradox: Even FDR, one of the greatest presidents the United States had ever seen, was humble enough to admit that language failed him.

Quickly returning to the ideals to which all Americans could relate (even if they were unable to assign a name to them), FDR began a discussion of freedom, a notion toward which various peoples have striven for centuries. It was discussed in the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, and countless other forums. Never in the history of the world, Roosevelt explained, had any other nation come so close to attaining this cherished ideal, but he also recognized that “we must more greatly build the security and the opportunity and the knowledge of every citizen, in the measure justified by the resources and the capacity of the land.” After achieving this goal, though, Americans would still have to tend to the “spirit” of the nation; if too much attention were focused on the letter of the law, the spirit of the American Constitution would be lost.

In the last few lines of the address, FDR made the first and only direct reference to military involvement in W.W.II: “The preservation of the spirit and faith of the nation does, and will, furnish the highest justification for every sacrifice that we may make in the cause of national defense.” He continued: “In the face of great perils never before encountered, our strong purpose is to protect and to perpetuate the integrity of democracy.” This sentence seemed to be endorsing American military participation in the war from that day forth, although the United States did not enter the war until after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Thus, it can be inferred that FDR was advocating more subtle support of democracy (instead of a direct opposition of tyranny) through, perhaps, rhetorical and symbolic (or economic and political) means. Whatever his meaning, Roosevelt chose to conclude his third inaugural address with language suggestive of war: “We do not retreat. . . .” Thus, if the nation were forced into the war, as it was in December of that year, the only option would be military engagement.

At the time of Roosevelt’s fourth and final inaugural address, he was fatally ill, and the novelty of the inaugural ceremony had understandably worn off for this president. Additionally, the war had taken its toll both on FDR and on the American people. Thus, his

speech to the American people was the briefest of his four, lasting only a few minutes. He began the address by reminding the people that they were “passing through a period of supreme test . . . of our essential democracy.”¹⁹ In these words, he unified the audience (which had already begun to come together against the threat of the war). This speech made no reference to a common past—presumably because the past was of minimal importance at this time when present actions would determine whether the past would even remain relevant. The future of the United States was therefore in question in 1945, and by focusing on this reality, Roosevelt emphasized to his listeners that this was a time for resolute action, not for ceremony or celebration. Unlike his third inaugural, in which he focused on symbolic ways to avoid war, this current address, delivered in the midst of a conflict that had already gone on too long, demonstrated that only by winning the proverbial battles could the Allies win the war.

With regard to both the armed conflict and the ideological debate of the era, Roosevelt asserted that “it is America’s purpose that we shall not fail.” Military success would lose its meaning if the political philosophy on which it was based fell victim to the war. In his statement, and in the sentences to follow, he not only made assertions about the Allied victory that was to come, but he seemed to be preparing the American people for a new era without the President they had learned to depend on for protection from all ills. Quoting his old schoolmaster as an elderly man would in conversation with his grandchildren, he reminded the audience that “‘Things in life will not always run smoothly. Sometimes we will be rising toward the heights—then all will seem to reverse itself and start downward. The great fact to remember is that the trend of civilization itself is forever upward; that a line drawn through the middle of the peaks and the valleys of the centuries always has an upward trend.’” At the beginning of his new term, it was peculiar that FDR would give what seemed to be parting advice to the nation, which he seemed to know would soon find itself without his leadership. In this address he attempted one last time to instill in his people a reverence of democracy so that they would never be tempted to compromise it for peace or for any other purpose.

In recalling common values, Roosevelt, again making use of a classic anaphora, reiterated that the nation could never give up its struggle for democratic ideals:

¹⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Fourth Inaugural Address, January 20, 1945,” *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950) 523. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 523-25.

And so today, in this year of war, 1945, we have learned lessons—at a fearful cost—and we shall profit by them.

We have learned that we cannot live alone, at peace; that our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations far away. We have learned that we must live as men, not as ostriches, nor as dogs in the manger.

We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community.

We have learned the simple truth, as Emerson said, that “the only way to have a friend is to be one.”

With the end of the war—but also, he clearly understood, his life—in sight, FDR wished to remind the nation that the people of the United States must never forget what they had to offer the world. Appealing once more to religion, he asserted that democracy itself had been bestowed upon the United States by God and that all peoples now strove toward that God-given ideal. At the end of this address (his last public address), he made an appeal to this divine power: “So we pray to Him now for the vision to see our way clearly—to see the way that leads to a better life for ourselves and for all our fellow men—to the achievement of His will, to peace on earth.” Halford Ryan, scholar of American presidential rhetoric, described the religious appeal of FDR’s last major speaking engagement as follows:

Serving as the country’s highest elected secular priest and presenting a customary ceremonial address, Roosevelt concluded with a providential benediction. Reverently the president recognized how Almighty God had blessed America by providing the people with stout hearts and strong hands; he inspired his countrymen with a reference to a faith that had become “the faith of all peoples in an anguished world.” The president prayed for the vision to perceive a better life for his country and all humanity and to promote His will of peace upon the earth.²⁰

FDR, like Lincoln and Washington before him, was irreversibly fixed on democratic ideals and was never afraid either to pursue them despite all obstacles or to promote them above all other issues in his interaction with the people. In this way, he adopted Theodore Roosevelt’s rhetorical strategy (which TR had used largely toward the passage of one particular bill) to meet the needs of a people whose mere existence had been challenged first by capitalism run rampant and later by the rise of tyrannical political ideologies.

While the inaugural address is traditionally an occasion for meditation on common values and principles, the state of the union message was intended to revolve around specific

policy issues. In the early years of the United States, the state of the union primarily served the purpose of providing “information on the state of the Union”; today, when mass media ensures that everyone who wishes to can obtain such information at any time, the address aims more directly to “recommend . . . such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.” Increasingly in this century, presidents use the former as a means of introducing the latter. In the 1939 Annual Message to Congress, FDR experimented with the notion of multiple audiences listening to a single speech. The address, subtitled “A Warning to Dictator Nations,” used the occasion to warn the leaders of such nations by reminding Congress of the military might of the United States and of the strength of American convictions. The theme—that the United States must and will be prepared for involvement in the war—clearly addressed both audiences: all mentions of “must” were imperatives to the Congress; the implication to enemies of the United States that Congress would act on their President’s words was expressed with “will.”

The address began by describing the precarious global situation of the time: “All about us rage undeclared wars—military and economic. All about us grow more deadly armaments—military and economic. All about us are threats of new aggression—military and economic. Storms from abroad directly challenge three institutions indispensable to Americans, now as always. The first is religion. It is the source of the other two—democracy and international good faith.”²¹ The generic elements, identified by Jamieson and Campbell, of the state of the union address, include the following “processes”: “public meditations on values, assessments of information and issues, and policy recommendations.”²² The first of these three components bears a striking resemblance to the inaugural’s “communal values drawn from the past”; while the difference in wording seems to imply that inaugural addresses must base their values in the past, this would seem to be the only source of “public” or “communal” values. In any case, he certainly succeeded in rehearsing public values (religion, democracy, and good faith), and he explored them in further detail as the speech progressed.

²⁰ Daniel Ross Chandler, “President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Fourth Inaugural Address, 1945,” *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents*, ed. Halford Ryan (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993) 137.

²¹ Franklin Roosevelt, “Annual Message to the Congress, January 4, 1939,” *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Macmillan, 1941) 1. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 1-12.

²² Campbell and Jamieson 54.

As for “assessment of information and issues,” FDR noted that the time had arisen for Americans to consider how much values such as democracy and freedom of religion were worth to them: “The defense of religion, of democracy and of good faith among nations is all the same fight. To save one we must now make up our minds to save all.” Clearly, the issue at stake in this address was American involvement in the war, which Roosevelt perceived as unavoidable. Out of fundamental information and issues naturally come policy recommendations. In approaching involvement in a new war, however, Americans needed to remember the lessons learned in World War I, and he cites several such lessons, ranging from defense to propaganda and the economics of war, all beginning with “We have learned that” While reminding Americans of the experience of twenty years earlier, FDR also hinted to the rest of the world that the United States was prepared to enter the war and that Americans had greatly improved their ability to wage war and to win. Because the American people were inclined toward isolationism, he directly addressed the impossibility of remaining neutral,²³ explaining that “[w]hen we deliberately try to legislate neutrality, our neutrality laws may operate unevenly and unfairly—may actually give aid to an aggressor and deny it to the victim.” Speaking directly to Congress, he announced that “[i]n the course of a few days I shall send you a special message making recommendations for those two essentials of defense [forces strong enough to oppose a direct attack and adequate weapons arsenals] against danger which we cannot safely assume will not come.” Again, in saying this he was ensuring that the rest of the world would be aware of American military might, and he certainly hoped that such declarations would deter attacks.

Using a metaphor of individual pieces of legislation as tools in the “new machinery” of the modern world, Roosevelt mentioned certain policy areas that needed to be improved: social security, employer-employee relations, transportation, and others. However, most of this address remained in the realm of reflection on democratic values. In a discussion of economic policy, FDR explained his vision in terms of the democratic ideals that were highlighted by the threat posed by aggressor nations. Clearly, he implied, the nation had not yet adapted to the new order established in post-Depression America, but its people would need to in order to deal effectively with international concerns of the era. He concluded this examination of economic considerations by stating, “Investment for prosperity can be made in a democracy,”

²³ Carol Gelderman, *All the Presidents' Words* (New York: Walker and Company, 1997) 22.

countering the fallacious opinion held by some citizens that dictatorship simplified many aspects of economic, social, and political life. Dictatorship, Roosevelt explained, costs a nation its “spiritual values”—a price Americans had so long ago proven themselves unwilling to pay. He proceeded to list all the other costs, again using anaphora: “The cost of the blessed right of being able to say what we please. The cost of freedom of religion. The cost of seeing our capital confiscated. The cost of being cast into a concentration camp. The cost of being afraid to walk down the street with the wrong neighbor. The cost of having our children brought up, not as free and dignified human beings, but as pawns molded and enslaved by a machine.” FDR explained that could only speak for himself (which is not true, as he is the nation’s spokesperson on this and many other important issues, but rhetorically shrewd) in saying that he would prefer higher taxes to the costs he had just enumerated.

He concluded the address by stating that “this generation of Americans” was at a crossroads and would ultimately seal the fate of the United States. Presidents had previously made such suggestions to the people about their role in the current crisis, and presidents since FDR have attempted to replicate this sense of danger and responsibility. Roosevelt’s tidy conclusion with a quote about “the last best hope of earth” reiterated the emphasis he placed on principles and values throughout the address and left his listeners with a sense of their immediate involvement, thereby charging each American citizen with making the right decision at this perilous hour.

This address, characteristic of all state of the unions in its use of the generic elements, was notably weighted toward the use of contemplation of American values. Its focus on assessment of issues was secondary to these values, and FDR addressed policy recommendations only when they seemed to flow logically from the first two elements. His telling Congress that he would give them more detailed recommendations at a later date demonstrates that already, in 1939, this address was not aimed at the members of Congress as much as it was designed to inform average Americans of the state of their union.

With the unexpected bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, FDR knew that the United States could no longer avoid engagement in the war. The day after the bombing, he addressed the Congress to ask for a declaration of war against Japan. In “the best speech he ever composed,”²⁴ Roosevelt used a line of reasoning reminiscent of the Declaration of

²⁴ Halford Ryan *Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Rhetorical Presidency* 151.

Independence, demonstrating the ways in which Japan, like the king of England almost two hundred years earlier, had failed American standards of decency. This speech employed a formal argument, implying (but never specifically stating) many logical elements based largely on the ideals of the American Revolution. In the address, FDR listed the sins Japan had committed. In addition to Pearl Harbor, “the Japanese government . . . deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace. . . . Yesterday, the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya. Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam. Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands,”²⁵ and the list of grievances continued. He summarized the situation by stating, “The facts of yesterday speak for themselves,” suggesting that, as the Declaration had explicitly stated, when a people is oppressed (or worse), it is their duty to defend themselves and protect freedom.

He then asserted that he could speak for the entire nation in saying that the United States would defend itself and would also “make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger” Americans in the future. In leading the nation to war as Roosevelt was attempting through this address, presidents seek first and foremost to legitimate their exercise of war powers. Jamieson and Campbell identify the following generic elements of all war rhetoric:

(1) every element in it proclaims that the momentous decision to resort to force is deliberate, the product of thoughtful consideration; (2) forceful intervention is justified through a chronicle or narrative from which argumentative claims are drawn; (3) the audience is exhorted to unanimity of purpose and total commitment; (4) the rhetoric not only justifies the use of force but also seeks to legitimate presidential assumption of the extraordinary powers of the commander in chief; and, as a function of these other characteristics, (5) strategic misrepresentations play an unusually significant role in its appeals.²⁶

In light of this quotation, it is perhaps more appropriate to say that the Declaration of Independence is a prime example of war rhetoric; as Thomas Jefferson surely understood that the king of England would not peacefully grant the colonies their independence, this document served as the first rhetorical step in the Revolution. In FDR’s address to Congress after the

²⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address to the Congress Asking That a State of War Be Declared Between the United States and Japan, December 8, 1941,” *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950) 514-515. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 514-515.

bombing of Pearl Harbor, he attempted to rally support for the imminent war effort (not only through the persuasiveness of the speech but also simply by assuming leadership of the people before the Congress). He concluded by reminding his audience that “the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7” had already brought the United States into the war—which was ultimately dependent not on a congressional declaration but rather on the presence of foreign bombs on American soil—and he implored Congress to make that state of war official. The last words of the address—those with which he left his listeners in Congress and across the nation—read as follows: “a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese empire.” While this clause was subject to the conditional beginning of the sentence, it left FDR’s listening audience with the reality that, declared or not, the war had begun. This pre-emptive declaration of the United States’ independence from Japanese domination set the tone for our entry into World War II, and its focus on elements particular to war rhetoric led to its success in rallying Americans around the flag in 1939, in sustaining morale throughout the war, and even today in historical analysis.

While the generic elements of presidential rhetoric are often helpful in determining the strengths and weaknesses of a speech, certain presidential utterances defy classification by genre; FDR’s fireside chats are but one example. In 1937, while the Depression was still foremost on Americans’ minds, Roosevelt held a fireside chat in which he first broached the issue of what came to be known as the “reorganization of the judiciary.” Beginning by mentioning a recent address in which he discussed the country’s economic struggles, he thanked his listeners for their attention and responses to this speech. Then, stating that this was the first radio address of his second term, he recalled the first of his initial term in order to remind the audience that his policies truly were successful in dealing with past problems. The Supreme Court, he explained, had consistently challenged a large portion of New Deal legislation since 1935, and it now constituted the only obstacle to a complete and timely economic recovery. Lkening the Court’s threat to the nation to the Depression itself, he reminded his listeners that “four years ago action did not come until the eleventh hour. It was almost too late,”²⁷ and Americans surely learned a very valuable lesson from that experience.

²⁶ Campbell and Jamieson 105.

²⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat” Discussing the Plan for Reorganization of the Judiciary, March 9 1937,” *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Macmillan, 1941) 123. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 122-33.

Then, in case the people perceived the Depression to be abating and the need for further legislation to be dwindling, FDR attempted to portray the situation in such a way as to remind them that the danger had not passed. "We are at a crisis in our ability to proceed with that protection," he said. "It is a quiet crisis. There are no lines of depositors outside closed banks. But to the far-sighted it is far-reaching in its possibilities of injury to America." Urging all Americans to be "far-sighted," he proceeded to present the Court as the only short-sighted of the branches American government. Then, stating that "I hope that you have re-read the Constitution of the United States in these past few weeks. Like the Bible, it ought to be read again and again," FDR suggested that his reasoning is grounded in the Constitution, which he likened to a sort of Bible for American governance; the Court was, by extension, a sinner.

Basing his argument for the reorganization of the judiciary on the Constitution, FDR demonstrated in various ways the constitutionality of his idea. Assuming that his popularity would spread to his proposed legislation, he ignored the fact that "constitutionality" was the very notion in question with regard to the laws the Court had struck down; constitutionality was, and would continue to be, subjective. However, the Court alone possessed the power to decide what was and was not constitutional, and his suggestion that the legislative and executive branches should have the power to fashion a Court to their liking offended the sensibilities of Americans in whom the notion of "balance of powers" was ingrained, no matter how desperately they wanted certain laws to be passed. Nevertheless, FDR attempted to use the people's sense of the balance of powers in order to prove that in "boldly assert[ing] a power to veto laws," the Court was "acting not as a judicial body, but as a policy-making body." Precisely because of the possibility of interpreting the Constitution in contradictory ways, FDR's attempts to prove the constitutionality of his plan called its constitutionality into question.

FDR's informality came across clearly on the radio, and this tone is still evident in the written text of this and other fireside chats. After giving a brief history of the situation about which he was speaking, he said simply, "What is my proposal? It is simply this," and proceeded to explain his plan in a single sentence. After explaining the reasoning behind his plan, he continued in this interrogative style, anticipating the questions and hesitations of his listeners. To the last such question, "What do they mean by the words 'packing the Court'?" he replied,

Let me answer this question with a bluntness that will end all honest misunderstanding of my purposes.

If by that phrase “packing the Court” it is charged that I wish to place on the bench spineless puppets who would disregard the law and would decide specific cases as I wished them to be decided, I make this answer: that no President fit for his office would appoint, and no Senate of honorable men fit for their office would confirm, that kind of appointees [*sic*] to the Supreme Court.

Using strong wording to polarize the debate, FDR attempted to allay the people’s worst fears, although he ignored the possibility that a nominee could fall between “spineless puppets” and objective upholders of the primary American political document. He continued to refer to an “attempt by those opposed to progress to play upon the fears of danger to personal liberty” and likened it to “that crude and cruel strategy tried by the same opposition to frighten the workers of America in a pay-envelope propaganda against the Social Security Law.” The people would thus have to choose between supporting and opposing progress.

In concluding the address, FDR returned to a theme with which he seemed to be struggling throughout the address: “the balance of power between the three great branches of the Federal Government.” Roosevelt proclaimed it to be his responsibility to restore this balance, but precisely how did he intend to accomplish this task? The notion of balance among the branches had been perverted in so many ways in his speech and in the larger “court-packing” debate that the people were no longer sure whether their President was seeking to restore or to further upset this balance. As a result, as much as citizens supported their leader, they could not blindly support this particular initiative, and its ultimate failure could not be avoided.

In attempting either to assign FDR’s address on the reorganization of the judiciary to a genre or to describe the generic elements of fireside chats, one must contemplate whether this president’s unique kind of address can truly be considered its own genre. If not, it would seem to fit into a larger category of informal addresses by presidents to the American people (including Bill Clinton’s weekly radio addresses and other such speeches by presidents since FDR). Clearly, the primary characteristic of fireside chats was their informal tone, but it is difficult to identify other absolute elements of this genre (if it can indeed be called a genre). These radio addresses were directed at ordinary citizens and usually used patriotism to elicit support from the audience, but the end toward which FDR used the patriotism varied immensely. In certain cases, patriotism *was* the principal end; at other times (as in the case of

the reorganization of the judiciary), policy initiatives were at the heart of the addresses. Accordingly, while some fireside chats explored parts of American history in order to evoke patriotism or merely to inform the people of a situation, others used the historical information as a framework from which to introduce the current problem and potential solutions.

Because the Constitution establishes the constructs of the presidency in such general terms, there are few absolute rules by which a president leads his administration. Likewise, the rhetoric of every president has varied at least slightly from the “norm”; included in this variety is a diversity of speaking styles and even the development of genres unique to a time and its technology or to a president. Thus, some speeches cannot be assigned to any genre; other speeches, such as FDR’s “Four Freedoms” state of the union address of 1941, correspond to more than one. Indeed, it is often the most important addresses that do not conform to a single genre. Nevertheless, generic analysis is clearly useful as a tool for exploring the similarities and differences among addresses. Moreover, within this structure it becomes possible to examine and compare individual presidents, eras, and circumstances, such as those that would present themselves in the decades following Franklin D. Roosevelt’s 12-year presidency.

III. HARRY S TRUMAN AND THE RHETORIC OF THE COLD WAR

A large part of the American president's responsibility lies in responding to problems that arise domestically and internationally during his term in office. For Roosevelt, this task had been especially difficult—but his response particularly masterful. When he died, his successor would be left to oversee the end of the War and the world's return to normalcy. While Germany and Japan capitulated within only a few months of FDR's death, no one could have suspected that the post-war world, almost as precarious as it had been during the war, would require nearly half a century to mend. Over the course of those decades, the responsibilities of the American president would shift toward increased attention to international affairs, propelling the United States into its role as the gendarme of the world.

The kinds of crises faced by the United States in the 1930s, 40's, and 50's—the Depression, the Second World War, and the beginning of the Cold War—presented modern opportunities for the fresh expressions of crisis leadership. The primary change that took place at the start of this “modern era” was that much of the current leadership would be effected through rhetorical means. FDR had already begun during his presidential campaign to ease the minds of Americans who had been struck by the Depression, and as the world emerged from W.W.II, Truman reacted to the conflict with the Soviet Union not in military but in rhetorical ways. The mere duration of this conflict ensured that presidential leadership throughout the Cold War (and after) would revolve more around words than around actions.

The Cold War, in fact, institutionalized crisis leadership as virtually the only kind of leadership in which a president could engage before the American people. In *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, and Ideology*, published shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, four co-authors examine different aspects of the rhetoric that came to exemplify this forty-year-long ideological battle. Martin Medhurst, who wrote the book's introduction, began his analysis of the strategies employed by Cold War presidents with several basic definitions:

[R]hetoric is not a matter of words or images alone. Certain individuals carry within themselves a rhetorical dimension. They are symbols that stand for ideals, beliefs, and actions that transcend the individual. The person selected to deliver a particular speech, for example, is a rhetorical choice. . . . Likewise, the selection of a place or occasion for delivery of the speech is also a rhetorical choice. By careful selection of a speaking site, astute rhetors can add to the persuasive force of their messages by building in a nonverbal or psychological source of reinforcement. Every component of the speaking situation—speaker,

message content, place, occasion, timing, immediate audience, medium of expression, intended outcomes—are rhetorical choices, choices that are, to a large degree, under the direct control of the message source The task of such rhetors is to examine both the contextual and rhetorical resources at their disposal and to select from among them the proper mix of factors to achieve the immediate and long-term goals. The task, in other words, is to think and act strategically.¹

“Strategically” was precisely how Harry Truman, a failed Missouri haberdasher, was compelled by circumstance to begin his presidency upon Roosevelt’s death on April 12, 1945. Indeed, just as George Washington began many rhetorical traditions for the nation at the end of the eighteenth century, this “plain-speaking”² man set certain precedents for all Cold War rhetoric to come and, consequently, for the future of popular presidential rhetoric. In addition to those decisions he consciously made regarding a specific address, however, other rhetorical factors contributed to the ways in which the Cold War was presented to the American people. Particular to no single president or address, but helpful to the United States’ cause, was the notion that the United States (the moral leader in the conflict) had peace-seeking “allies”; the Soviet Union, a coercive force of evil, was said to have dictatorially controlled its “satellites”—even though countries such as Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia were indeed controlled by Hungarian, Polish, and Czechoslovakian communist regimes.³ This subtle distinction between allies and satellites is only one example of ways in which western definition of key terms contributed to the Cold War debate; presidents quickly adopted such terms to the benefit of the American cause.

President Harry S Truman presided over the United States during years of arguably even greater peril than that faced by the Roosevelt administration. Within slightly less than eight years, Truman faced the end of World War II and the decision to drop the atomic bomb, the onset of the Cold War, and even the beginning of the civil rights movement. With regard to his rhetoric, clearly the most influential of these events was the Cold War, which led to a “war of words” that would last for four decades and had tremendous effects on the American

¹ Martin Medhurst, “Rhetoric and Cold War: A Strategic Approach,” *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, and Ideology* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1997) 22-23.

² Robert L. Ivie, “Cold War Motives and the Rhetorical Metaphor: A Framework of Criticism,” *Cold War Rhetoric* 74.

³ Robert Scott, “Cold War Rhetoric: Conceptually and Critically,” *Cold War Rhetoric* 3.

president's role in international affairs as well as within the country. The world had recently been transformed by World War II and its bitter end; before examining the roots of the conflict with the Soviet Union, however, it is necessary to return to 1945, when Truman first entered into the presidency.

Truman had the misfortune of succeeding Franklin Roosevelt, the most beloved president of the twentieth century.⁴ The burden of World War II was thrust onto his shoulders, and a mere four months after entering the Oval Office, he was charged with one of the most difficult decisions an American president has ever had to make: the decision to drop the atomic bomb. Because of his lack of experience with matters of such scope, Truman wisely deferred to his advisors on this question, although he was ultimately accountable for the consequences thereof. Included in these awesome duties was the responsibility of reporting what had occurred to the nation and to the world.

By August 6, 1945, the decision had been made, and the first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. With this event, the atomic age was ushered in, but it clearly demanded a formal introduction. The first time the Japanese learned the details of the Allied innovation in warfare was during Truman's statement announcing the use of the A-bomb at Hiroshima—sixteen hours after it had devastated the city. This was also the day most Americans first received news of the bomb; in one of his first and most important public addresses as president, Truman introduced the bomb to the nation. While ostensibly addressing the American public, however, the president was speaking to a much wider audience. He used this speech both to announce the bombing of Hiroshima to the United States and to remind Japan of the ultimatum ("prompt and utter destruction") the Allies had issued. Moreover, in taking responsibility for the first public correspondence about the A-bomb, he was able to shape popular opinion about the bombing; because the media in 1945 was still as docile as if it were the president's "lapdog,"⁵ he was even able to set the tone for their reports.

Not unlike all of the war messages the people had grown used to hearing from their president, the address opened with a factual description of the circumstances of the bombing:

Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped a bomb on Hiroshima, an important Japanese Army base. That bomb had more power than 20,000 tons

⁴ Theodore J. Lowi, *The Personal President: Power Invested, Promise Unfulfilled* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

⁵ Larry Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism Has Transformed American Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1993) 25-26.

of T.N.T. It had more than two thousand times the blast power of the British “Grand Slam” which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare.

The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold. And the end is not yet. With this bomb we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces. In their present form these bombs are now in production and even more powerful forms are in development.⁶

The initial sentences of this address were crucial because they first presented the event to Americans, who at the time of the announcement had not yet heard any news of the bombing, or even of the atomic capabilities of their military. At this point in the speech, American listeners only understood that a very large bomb had been used against Japan, which seemed to vary from other bombings only in the magnitude of the blast. Using terms his American and British audience, for several years accustomed to the language of war, would understand, he equated the bomb used at Hiroshima to a presumably well-known British bomb. At this point, Allied listeners’ only true indication of the gravity of the situation came through Truman’s somber delivery of the address. The next few sentences continued this serious tone. After several statements of fact, Truman eased the discourse into more subjective commentary as he addressed both the Allied and the Japanese audiences. To Americans who had heard nothing of the bomb, he was giving it a formal introduction—but at this point, Truman was still being mysterious about its exact nature. This vagueness was a result of the fact that he was not speaking uniquely to Americans curious about the status of the war; much of this paragraph was reminiscent of the equally nebulous Potsdam Declaration and thus served to remind Japan that it had been warned. Moreover, if the Japanese continued to ignore Allied requests for surrender, he reiterated, Japan could expect another bomb like Hiroshima’s—indeed, even more powerful than at Hiroshima.

The third paragraph answered the question he had aroused in the minds of his listeners. Here, he finally told them how this bomb differed from the thousands of bombs exchanged since the beginning of the war:

It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.

⁶ Harry Truman, “Statement by the President Announcing the Use of the A-bomb at Hiroshima, August 6, 1945,” *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961) 197. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 197-200.

Before 1939, it was the accepted belief of scientists that it was theoretically possible to release atomic energy. But no one knew any practical method of doing it. By 1942, however, we knew that the Germans were working feverishly to find a way to add atomic energy to the other engines of war with which they hoped to enslave the world. But they failed. We may be grateful to Providence that the Germans got the V-1's and V-2's late and in limited quantities and even more grateful that they did not get the atomic bomb at all.

In the first three sentences, Truman used scientific imagery simultaneously to depict the natural, physical aspects of the bomb and to stir up the emotions of all his listeners, Japanese or American. Additionally, in the third line, he reminded all members of his audience that the Japanese were indeed “those who brought war to the Far East”—that they deserved the devastation that had been wrought upon them. In the next paragraph, and the several that follow, he recounted the history of the Manhattan Project, filling Americans in on the secret they had been financing for years. Throughout this historical sketch Truman interspersed reminders that Americans were not wrong to seek such a terrible weapon—that Japan, as well as Germany, had compelled President Roosevelt to investigate new weapons during the war.

After concluding the explanation of the Project's history with the words, “We have spent two billion dollars on the greatest scientific gamble in history—and won,” he rallied support for the United States and the Army:

But the greatest marvel is not the size of the enterprise, its secrecy, nor its cost, but the achievement of scientific brains in putting together infinitely complex pieces of knowledge held by many men in different fields of science into a workable plan. And hardly less marvelous has been the capacity of industry to design, and of labor to operate, the machines and methods to do things never done before so that the brain child of many minds came forth in physical shape and performed as it was supposed to do. Both science and industry worked under the direction of the United States Army, which achieved a unique success in managing so diverse a problem in the advancement of knowledge in an amazingly short time. It is doubtful if such another combination could be got together in the world. What has been done is the greatest achievement of organized science in history. It was done under high pressure and without failure.

Using such phrases as “greatest marvel,” “achieved a unique success,” and “the greatest achievement of organized science in history,” Truman diverted his audience's attention from the war context of the speech and offered many examples of aspects of the Project of which Americans should be, above all, proud. As he returned to the real subject of the address, he proceeded to use the pride he had evoked:

We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war.

It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms, they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth. Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such numbers and power as they have not yet seen and with the fighting skill of which they are already well aware.

In fact, much of this paragraph was exaggerated for the benefit of both the American and Japanese audiences. The first sentence, for instance, specifically included the word "now," although after the bombing of Hiroshima, the United States only possessed one more atomic bomb; it would be months before more would be ready. The President, trying to act presidential, did not want his people to know this fact, however, and he certainly did not want the Japanese to know that the Americans could not in fact deliver the "rain of ruin from the air" he was threatening. The Japanese had already earned a reputation for being extraordinarily persistent, and Truman did not wish Japan to sacrifice one more city in order to exhaust the Allies' secret weapon. Additionally, when Truman mentioned the Potsdam Declaration he had issued to Japan, he let his American audience believe that the Declaration fully explained the capabilities of the atomic bomb, which it did not. Truman was again attempting to rally his fellow citizens behind him by reminding them that Japan had done everything possible to incite such attacks. With regard to his Japanese audience, on the other hand, he was now restating the original ultimatum infinitely more clearly.

After this effectively worded paragraph, which could have served as a very pointed conclusion, Truman had essentially finished his announcement, there remained technical details to address. Because he had given his American audience so much shocking information within such a short period of time, he knew that he could not leave them with the notion of unrestrained nuclear war, and he rightly assumed that he would need to explain future prospects for atomic power:

The fact that we can release atomic energy ushers in a new era in man's understanding of nature's forces. Atomic energy may in the future supplement the power that now comes from coal, oil, and falling water, but at present it cannot be produced on a basis to compete with them commercially. . . .

It has never been the habit of the scientists of this country or the policy of this Government to withhold from the world scientific knowledge. Normally, therefore, everything about the work with atomic energy would be made public.

But under present circumstances it is not intended to divulge the technical processes of production or all the military application, pending further examination of possible methods of protecting us and the rest of the world from the danger of sudden destruction.

I shall recommend that the Congress of the United States consider promptly the establishment of an appropriate commission to control the production and use of atomic power within the United States. I shall give further consideration and make further recommendations to the Congress as to how atomic power can become a powerful and forceful influence towards the maintenance of world peace.

Here, Truman put listeners' minds at ease by assuring them that the government was aware of the dangers of using the bomb indiscriminately (although, admittedly, the American military proceeded to use it once again three days later). By addressing concerns that were on the minds of many Americans, British, and others, Truman was able to conclude his address on a more positive note, and by suggesting the globally beneficial aspects of nuclear energy, he reassured the American people that not only would the war be resolved as a result of the atomic bomb, but humanity would continue to benefit from the scientific advances achieved through the process of its development. Through this address, Truman succeeded in informing each of his principal audiences in ways that ultimately served his goals on both counts: the war soon drew to a close, and the American people, hardly lacking in patriotism during World War II, accepted Truman's interpretation of the bombing of Hiroshima and the subsequent bombing of Nagasaki. Undeniably, though, a large part of what made his rhetorical strategy so successful was his willingness to embellish, which, under the circumstances, made this address true to Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as the use of the best available means of persuasion.

Eighteen months later, Truman faced the next major challenge of his presidency. Europe was not recovering from the war as it should have been, and Great Britain's economic difficulties meant that other nations to which it lent support were also succumbing to the post-war hardships. The Truman Doctrine, delivered to Congress on March 12, 1947, ostensibly addressed the issue of Great Britain's inability to continue financial support to Greece and Turkey. In his speech, Truman proposed that the United States assume this responsibility. He began by asserting that the Greek government was in danger of being taken over by rebel groups led by communists. If the American government did not provide economic support, Greece would fall to the communists. If that were to happen, Turkey would likely fall as well, he claimed. In this address, Truman's persuasive rhetoric served as a first step in the establishment of the United States' Cold War policy of containment.

After explicating the desperate situation in Greece, Truman added that Turkey required support against communism as well. From this point, the address became very ideological, stating that “[o]ne of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion.”⁷ Building on the American ideal of freedom, which few Americans would dispute, the speech proceeded to announce Truman’s new doctrine: “I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” In an earlier draft of the speech, this sentence had read, “I believe that it *should* be . . .”; when Truman read it, he changed this line, strengthening it into arguably the single most important of the speech.⁸

The most noticeable rhetorical device used in this speech is the contrast between democracy and communism, freedom and oppression, the United States and the Soviet Union. Without ever using the word “Soviet,” Truman clearly stated that the USSR was the enemy, and it needed to be controlled. The bold wording of this speech could be contrasted with George C. Marshall’s celebrated address at Harvard University 3 months later, in which he stated that “[o]ur policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos.”⁹ Whereas Marshall made an effort to be diplomatic, knowing that his words would be heard by Europeans as well as Americans, Truman seemed to have no fears about his words’ being misinterpreted by the Soviets; he could not have been much more offensive if he had said, “Our policy is directed against the Soviet Union and communism.”

In the event that members of Congress and other Americans in his audience were not convinced that Greece and Turkey were important enough to merit such assistance as Truman was proposing, he took his argument one step further, suggesting the disastrous effects the “domino theory” could have on this situation. He asserted that if Greece and Turkey fell to communism, their neighbors would as well, until the communists controlled enough of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia to pose a serious threat to the security of the United States: “Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to

⁷ Harry Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine, March 12, 1947,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963) 178. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 176-80.

⁸ Halford Ryan, *Harry S. Truman: Presidential Rhetoric* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993) 30.

the West as well as to the East,” and “If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation.”

This address incorporated elements of classical and modern rhetoric, supplementing the logical, albeit somewhat alarmist, political argument in favor of supporting Greece and Turkey with dramatic emotional appeals such as, “The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grown in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive.” Further, in concluding with “Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events. I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities squarely,” Truman shifted the responsibility from “us”—the legislative and executive branches together—onto Congress alone, virtually ensuring that only the legislature would be held accountable in the people’s eyes if “the welfare of our own nation” was indeed compromised.

At the time, the world may not have been aware of the momentousness of Truman’s words, but with this speech he had officially ushered in the Cold War. One year earlier, Winston Churchill had acknowledged the Cold War on behalf of Great Britain in his “iron curtain” speech (“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”¹⁰). Here Truman, rhetorically usurping a power of the Congress, first declared “war” on the Soviet Union. Further, Truman’s speech, like that of the great British Prime Minister, could even be considered the first attack in this “war of words”:

Rhetoric was not something added on or peripheral to or substituting for the ‘real’ issues. No, rhetoric *was* the issue; it constituted the central substance that required serious attention if the Cold War was to remain cold and rhetoric was to continue to be used in place of instruments of death. A Cold War is, by definition, a rhetorical war, a war fought with words, speeches, pamphlets, public information (or disinformation) campaigns, slogans, gestures, symbolic actions, and the like.¹¹

Forces on both sides of the American-Soviet Cold War incorporated all of these elements into the battles they fought, unlike in a “real” war wherein propaganda and symbolism are secondary to military combat. In the case of Truman, who oversaw the beginning of the Cold War, his use of propaganda arguably contributed to the magnitude and the great duration of the confrontation.

⁹ George C. Marshall, Harvard University commencement address, Cambridge, MA, 5 June 1947.

¹⁰ Winston Churchill, “The Iron Curtain,” Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, 5 March 1946.

When Truman delivered his inaugural address in 1949, he had already been President for almost four years and had dealt with issues of extraordinary significance, yet he had only established a true presidential mandate from the people in the election of two months earlier. Having succeeded the nation's beloved Roosevelt, Truman was all too aware that he had been held to extraordinary expectations during his first term and remained in a precarious situation at the beginning of his second. Nevertheless, his successes with ending the Second World War, the beginning of the Cold War, and the Marshall Plan, as well as shrewd campaigning,¹² had allowed him to retain the presidency in 1949. One of Truman's aides suggested that he restrict his 1949 state of the union message (delivered only days before the inaugural) to domestic affairs in order to allow the inaugural to address all issues of international importance while he truly had the world's attention,¹³ and there is no doubt that this strategy was adopted in its composition. Indeed, a New York Times article called it "one of the most ambitious pronouncements on foreign affairs ever made by an American President."¹⁴

Speaking at the midpoint of the twentieth century, he was rhetorically poised to recall the first half of the century, "marked by unprecedented and brutal attacks on the rights of man, and by the two most frightful wars in history,"¹⁵ and to look forward toward the second half, during which the United States would surely be called for guidance. After an uplifting, Roosevelt-style introduction emphasizing American values ("peace," "harmony," "goodwill," "strength," "wise leadership," "equal justice," and "freedom"), Truman called attention to the "regime with contrary aims and a totally different concept of life"—a regime that "adheres to a false philosophy which purports to offer freedom, security, and greater opportunity to mankind." Before giving this regime a name, he demonstrated the evils associated with it, finally announcing, "That false philosophy is communism."

The next eight paragraphs, all but one of which consist of only one sentence, made use of antithesis to contrast communism and democracy, alternating between the two philosophies and finally returning to "peace," "stability," and "freedom" as ideals that can only be maintained by democratic regimes. Truman then recounted the efforts the United States had

¹¹ Medhurst, *Cold War Rhetoric* xiv.

¹² Thomas Langston, *With Reverence and Contempt* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) 41.

¹³ Halford Ryan, "President Harry S. Truman's Inaugural Address, 1949," *Inaugural Addresses* 141.

¹⁴ James Reston, "Speech Seen as Aid to Western World," *The New York Times* 21 January 1949: 1.

made since the end of W.W.II to restore the balance of power—political, territorial, military, and economic—to the world. Clearly, the formation of the United Nations was an important development that had occurred during Truman’s first administration, but even more significant was the Marshall Plan, begun in 1948. Again using such words and phrases as “cooperative,” “invigorate and strengthen democracy,” “free,” “security,” “welfare,” “hope,” “liberty,” and “peace,” he reminded the people that “the initiative is ours.”

Outlining his administration’s plan for the next four years, he cited a quartet of specific objectives: to strengthen the United Nations, to continue the Marshall Plan and to seek other means of worldwide economic recovery and increased world trade, to support the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and other international security measures, and to investigate new scientific and industrial advancements. All four of these goals, while their realization would ultimately protect the “more than half the people of the world . . . living in conditions approaching misery,” also served directly to support the United States militarily and economically. As in the Truman Doctrine address and the Marshall Plan, American prosperity was being offered as a means of sustaining the world, which would in turn promote American prosperity. Truman thus emphasized the “win-win” nature of the situation:

For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people. The United States is preeminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. . . . Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more power to lighten their burdens. . . .

All countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world’s human and natural resources. Experience shows that our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically.

Truman was very candid about the myriad advantages of such a plan. By emphasizing the prosperity of all free nations—and he did specify that the aim “should be to help the *free* peoples of the world [emphasis added]”—the United States would benefit, but, more important, the entire free world would secure its future prosperity.

¹⁵ Harry Truman, “Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964) 112. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 112-16.

At many points in the address, Truman used the word “prosperity” immediately followed by “peace”; the clear implication was that if prosperity grew in the free world as a whole, peace would indeed ensue. Building on the American people’s fear of another war, he did not need to address this possibility explicitly, but, by emphasizing the notion of peace, he reminded his listeners that peace could not be taken for granted. Listing those who were helping the United States in achieving their common goals—“all who wish to live in freedom from fear,” “all who want relief from the lies of propaganda,” “all who desire self-government and a voice in deciding their own affairs,” “all who long for economic security,” and “all who desire freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom to live their own lives for useful ends”—reminded Americans that they too supported such ideals and reinforced one final time what they would stand to lose if communism spread.

If the objectives of his administration were met, Truman stated in his conclusion, he believed that “[i]n due time, as our stability becomes manifest, as more and more nations come to know the benefits of democracy and to participate in growing abundance, . . . those countries which now oppose it will abandon their delusions and join with the free nations of the world in a just settlement of international differences.” Finally, after already using the word fourteen times in the course of the speech, he repeated that the ultimate end of the Truman administration (and the last word of the inaugural itself) was, simply, peace.

This address, which seemed to overstep the “principles-before-policies” standard for inaugurals, raised the following question in a January 1949 New York Times article: “What was this . . . the pronouncement of a carefully developed policy, or merely a speech, a statement of hopes and intentions?” The author of this article answered his own question as follows: “It was really a summary of policies and principles already accepted by the Administration; . . . it was a kind of declaration of independence; . . . and it foreshadowed, not something new and sensational but merely an extension of programs and ideas already in existence.”¹⁶ Truman, like Roosevelt several years before, knew that the people required action and began his second term prepared to deliver precisely that.

¹⁶ Reston 7.

In 1952 “the United States and the whole free world [were] passing through a period of grave danger,”¹⁷ as Truman announced in his state of the union address. If one accepts the Truman Doctrine as the official start of the Cold War, this “war of words” had already been in progress for five years, and no one had any misconceptions about the end’s not being in sight. As in every major address of the time, Truman emphasized that the danger was imminent; the consequences of every action taken by the United States needed to be carefully weighed in order to continue along the fine line American and Soviet leaders had drawn. Truman explained that in the previous year the United States “threw back aggression, added greatly to our military strength, and improved the changes for peace and freedom in many parts of the world.” As he had done in so many speeches before, he explained that, despite the advances already made, the war was far from over, and Americans needed to continue to oppose the communist forces wherever they threatened the free world. Continuing with this rhetorical strategy, Truman added that “1952 is a critical year in the defense effort of the whole free world. If we falter we can lose all the gains we have made. If we drive ahead, with courage and vigor and determination, we can by the end of 1952 be in a position of much greater security. The way will be dangerous for the years ahead, but if we put forth our best efforts this year—and next year—we can be ‘over the hump’ in our effort to build strong defenses.” This line of reasoning would continue for decades, for American advancements were generally accompanied by Soviet advances. Thus, neither side ever appeared to be “winning,” yet American presidents (and doubtless Soviet leaders as well) continued to suggest that every additional bit of preparedness could finally break their adversaries.

In the early 1950s, disarmament had proven not to be a viable option, as Truman explained:

At the present session of the United Nations in Paris, we, together with the British and the French, offered a plan to reduce and control all armaments under a foolproof inspection system. This is a concrete, practical proposal for disarmament.

But what happened? Vishinsky [a minister in the Soviet government] laughed at it. Listen to what he said: “I could hardly sleep at all last night. . . . I could not sleep because I kept laughing.” The world will be a long time forgetting the spectacle of that fellow laughing at disarmament.

¹⁷ Harry Truman, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 9, 1952,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966) 9. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 9-17.

The Americans clearly wished to disarm; failure to do so was entirely the fault of the Soviet Union's aggressive, militaristic nature. Not only was the Soviet Union unwilling to consider ceasing the production of weapons, including atomic bombs, but that nation continued to increase production of those goods necessary for war. All blame for the precarious global situation, Truman assured the people, could be placed on the Soviets.

Neither Truman nor any other American president could have known exactly how long the Cold War would last. Their hope was obviously for a rapid resolution, but in their effort to keep armed struggles from occurring, they could only wage battles through *development* of new weapons—and their words. Truman returned again and again to the notion that “we cannot expect to complete the job overnight,” but that every effort must nevertheless be made to give the United States every advantage. Stockpiling weapons served two distinct purposes: deterrence and defense. Toward both objectives, the United States would be as prepared as possible. Americans had been pursuing the former goal since the end of World War II; many had personal experience with the latter in Korea and did not wish to relive it.

For anyone who still believed the United States should “ease up in the fight for peace,” Truman wished to offer three reminders:

First: The threat of world war is still very real. We had one Pearl Harbor—let's not get caught off guard again. . . .

Second: If the United States had to try to stand alone against a Soviet-dominated world, it would destroy the life we know and the ideals we hold dear. Our allies are essential to us, just as we are essential to them. . . .

Third: The things we believe in most deeply are under relentless attack. We have the great responsibility of saving the basic moral and spiritual values of our civilization.

These three elements represent the “facts” Truman wished to convey to all his listeners. For his American audience, he needed to prove that the Soviets were willing to engage in war, that the U.S.S.R.'s military strength was already far superior to that of the United States, and that communist ideals were fundamentally opposed to the tenets of democracy. He also needed to convince his Soviet audience that Americans trusted their President with regard to these trends and were devoted in reversing them.

In Korea, Truman said, American forces needed to continue the battle until the war could be ended on terms amenable to democratic ideals: “We went into the fight to save the Republic of Korea, a free country, established under the United Nations. These are our aims. We will not give up until we attain them.” He then turned his attention to a number of peace

treaties, including NATO, maintaining that such measures were secondary to bolstering “forces and equipment” to back up the treaties. Although the Marshall Plan was drawing to a close in 1952, Truman stressed the importance of continuing to support European allies (economically as well as militarily) so that they would attain self-sufficiency. Moreover, communist nations would require aid in order to be able, eventually, to throw off the Soviet influences that permeated them. Echoing his words in the Truman Doctrine address (“The United States contributed \$341,000,000 toward winning World War II. This is an investment in world freedom and world peace. The assistance that I am recommending for Greece and Turkey amounts to little more than $\frac{1}{10}$ of 1 percent of this investment. It is only common sense that we should safeguard this investment and make sure that it was not in vain.”¹⁸), he told the Congress that “less than one-third of the expenditure for the cost of World War II would have created the developments necessary to feed the whole world so we wouldn’t have to stomach communism. This is what we have got to fight, and unless we fight that battle and win it, we can’t win the cold war or a hot one either.” Strong economies—in the United States as well as in western Europe and in Soviet-dominated countries—were crucial to the abandonment of communism as a political regime.

After discussing the international situation, Truman returned to a discussion of American defense, reiterating that, here too, a powerful economy would foster an ability to resist the Soviet Union militarily. In the previous few paragraphs, Truman had shifted his attention from American citizens in general to directly addressing Congress; although he had already spent the majority of his speech expounding upon the perils of communism, he had done so for the benefit of average Americans. Now, in the policy recommendation portion of the speech, he restated the United States’ exigencies toward defeating the Soviet Union; however, this part of the address displayed a marked lack of ideological grounding, instead making simple economic, industrial, political, social, and recommendations. Nestled among these “technical” matters was the statement that taxes will increase in the coming years. Not surprisingly, Truman merely announced that he would discuss this issue in greater detail in an upcoming report to Congress. More suggestions followed, piecemeal-style, as Truman recommended reforms in education, social security, labor law, and many other areas before he

¹⁸ Harry Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine, March 12, 1947,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963) 180.

returned to the abstract notion of freedom in the context of civil rights: “The executive branch has been making real progress toward full equality of treatment and opportunity—in the Armed Forces, in the civil service, and in private firms working for the Government. Further advances require action by Congress, and I hope that means will be provided to give the Members of the Senate and the House a chance to vote on them.” Again, Truman emphasized that he was making every effort to promote American ideals but that success in this venture hinged on Congress’ willingness to do the same.

Among policy-oriented statements about the Congress and budget initiatives, the following two sentences reinforced Truman’s point about the Soviet conflict and exemplified his “plain-speaking” style: “All these measures I have been talking about—measures to advance the well-being of our people—demonstrate to the world this forward movement of our free society. This demonstration of the way free men govern themselves has a more powerful influence on the people of the world—on both sides of the Iron Curtain—than all the trick slogans and pie-in-the-sky promises of the Communists.” Truman followed FDR’s example of addressing the public on their level, yet Truman, as a true “man of the people,” did not require any special effort to accomplish this goal. Moreover, because he was not a “politician” like most other presidents, his words carried more weight when he spoke of Washington institutions and their flaws, as he did in the last few paragraphs of the address.

The end of the speech alternated between discussion of Congress as an institution and general reflection on American ideals. The rhetorical connection between these two ideas, Truman emphasized, was that this nation is committed to such ideals as freedom and equality for all, yet a “shortcoming” of the Congress was “dishonesty among public servants,” which hindered the ability of honest members of Congress and citizens to pursue the best interest of the nation. After touching briefly on the harmful effects of McCarthyism, the address ended with the image of General Washington at Valley Forge, reminding his countrymen that “[w]e must not, in so great a contest, expect to meet with nothing but sunshine.” Americans in 1952, too, needed to remember that freedom and equality required more than fair-weather supporters. The crisis faced by the United States was “a contest just as important for this country and for all men, as the desperate struggle that George Washington fought through to victory,” Truman explained, preserving the weather metaphor. “Let us prove, again, that we are not merely sunshine patriots and summer soldiers. Let us go forward, trusting in the God of Peace, to win the goals we seek.”

In this address, Truman sought to prove that strong diplomatic action was necessary even when it seemed difficult or futile. However, throughout his presidency, the more important notion to reinforce was that decisive action was equally essential when it seemed unnecessary—at those times when the Soviet threat was less immediate. Because American citizens are notoriously complacent about their world, believing that problems they cannot see or feel cannot harm them, Cold War presidents needed to keep the American-Soviet conflict alive in the minds of the people. Otherwise, the American front in the Cold War would lose popular support and with it the defense budget that maintained the United States' position in it.

Had Truman presided over a crisis of short duration—had the Cold War ended in the 1950s—his rhetorical strategies would likely have died with the conflict. However, because it lasted through the administrations of seven subsequent presidents, his rhetoric established many precedents upon which later presidents expanded. Just as American military power increased throughout the course of the Cold War but was based largely on the 1945 innovation of atomic warfare, American rhetorical power began with Truman's addresses at the end of World War II and grew into the unique Cold War rhetoric of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and beyond.

Rhetoric, especially when it is interpreted as constituting something as great in scope as a "Cold War," has no definite limits. Truman understood this fact as he attempted to lead the United States out of the Second World War and navigate the new bipolar world; much of this leadership was rhetorical in nature and, above all, unprecedented. While even Truman would likely have been unable to define the terms of the Cold War, he understood his goals and the strategies he employed toward them. Cold War scholar Robert L. Scott, examining the issues from a rhetorical perspective, had the benefit of hindsight but still could only arrive at the following conclusions:

Of course rhetoric is an abstract concept, that is, it is one of the convenient labels we use to work with the stuff of our lives. Words are part of that stuff, and so are other people. We can dispense with rhetoric in the sense that we can find a vocabulary that avoids the term and other terms traditionally associated with it. Depending on the audiences we are involved with, such an avoidance may be wise. But the problems that arise from being engaged in the events of our lives, of having to communicate about those with others in circumstances that make our concerted actions vital, or at least seem vital to use, will assure us that rhetoric, by whatever label, will be present.¹⁹

¹⁹ Scott 7.

At many points during the Truman administration and later, rhetoric was essential in preventing armed conflict from erupting between the Soviet Union and the United States.²⁰ By making American intentions known, Truman was able to act in ways that may otherwise have been perceived as mere acts of aggression, as was the case after the bombing of Hiroshima (by explicitly demanding Japanese capitulation and threatening further destruction, he precipitated their surrender) and through the Truman Doctrine address, which outlined the process of “containment” he was advocating. Harry Truman thus helped to guarantee that rhetoric would be increasingly present in presidential leadership and had an immense, though underexamined, impact on the future of the American presidency and its rhetoric.

²⁰ Scott 11.

IV. DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER AND *THE SYMBOLIC PRESIDENCY*

When a president-elect steps forward to take the oath of office, he has already, in a certain sense, entered into the realm of the presidency. Chief executives from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries have contributed to a larger-than-life conception of the presidency, and it is this office—and not merely the executive as described in the second article of the Constitution—into which each new president enters. Barbara Hinckley examines the vast, extraconstitutional aspects of the presidency in her 1990 book, *The Symbolic Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves*. Hinckley defines a political symbol as “[t]he communication by political actors to others for a purpose, in which the specific object referred to conveys a larger range of meaning, typically with emotional, moral, or psychological impact. This larger meaning need not be independently or factually true, but will tap ideas people want to believe in as true.”¹ Under this definition, almost all actions taken by a president have a symbolic component in addition to the absolute deed. For instance, Hinckley notes that the president is seen as an economic leader because he at is the head of the branch of government that is responsible for managing the economy. As the sole individual whose name is attached to an administration of thousands of people, the president’s role is understandably perceived as larger than it could ever possibly be. Moreover, the citizens rarely acknowledge the symbolic roles he must also play, but these are among the furthest-reaching.

Hinckley identifies several such roles the president assumes when (or even before) he enters into the executive office. He must act as the primary political leader for the country, representing the nation to the world, the military in his capacity as its commander-in-chief, and the American people before many different constituencies. According to Hinckley, he must also act as a moral leader for the nation (although her work was published before the beginning of Bill Clinton’s anomalous presidency, which might call this notion into question), making him a sort of father figure for the people. Related to his moral leadership, the president often also represents the nation before God, serving not as the principal religious leader of the nation but as someone who draws on such guidance when necessary.² The expression of these roles,

¹ Barbara Hinckley, *The Symbolic Presidency* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 7.

² Hinckley.

while not necessarily verbal, is often through speeches and other rhetorical means, and in her investigation of this subject, Hinckley cites many ways in which the symbolism associated with the presidency manifests itself in the public address of the president.

Dwight D. Eisenhower's speeches, neither particularly effective in the 1950s nor especially fondly received by experts, historians, or older Americans today, nevertheless demonstrated many of the symbolic elements identified by Hinckley and other political scientists and communications scholars. While his addresses were never exceptional in their use of symbolism or imagery, they serve as a body of speeches from which to study conventional kinds of presidential symbolism as expressed through the rhetoric of modern presidents.

When Eisenhower was inaugurated in 1953, his first words did not explicitly address the struggle that was currently taking place in Korea and was surely occupying the minds of most Americans. Instead, he spent his first minutes as president saying what he called "a little private prayer of my own."³ Although this prayer was indeed a private conversation between Eisenhower and God—he was asking for all the necessary skills and the strength to be the president the nation demanded at that time—he brought the nation into the prayer by saying it while he had the full attention of the American people. Thus began a presidency that remains known for its use of religious symbols, despite the fact that Eisenhower was never among the more religious men to occupy the White House.⁴ Continuing the prayer, he then made the following request on behalf of his entire administration: "Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land. Especially we pray that our concern shall be for all the people regardless of station, race, or calling." Through this religious appeal, he ensured that Americans would have faith that his presidency would be guided by a higher authority (and one in whom they had boundless trust).

This theme of determining right from wrong, and of applying it correctly to all peoples around the world, continued throughout the address. For a president who assumes divine

³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1953," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960) 1. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 1-8.

⁴ Hinckley 5.

guidance, it is only a small step further to assert that this guidance provides the mandate for moral leadership as well. After this prayer, the second sentence to Eisenhower's "fellow citizens" was that "[w]e sense with all our faculties that forces of good and evil are massed and armed and opposed as rarely before in history." He then asserted that the purpose of the present inauguration was for the people, himself included, "to give testimony in the sight of the world to our faith that the future shall belong to the free." After a brief summary of the world's recent political and military endeavors, he again reminded the people that he sought (and, because of the nobility of the American cause, would surely receive) divine guidance. This guidance would be of utmost importance during his administration, for, as conflicts such as the Korean War showed, the struggle between good and evil—democracy and communism—would likely be an international theme throughout the 1950s. Because not all societies were free ones, Eisenhower said, those peoples who still possessed their freedom needed to "proclaim anew" their faith in this ideal in order that it would not wither and fade from the earth forever. Harkening back to the Declaration of Independence, he asserted that such faith "establishes, beyond debate, those gifts of the Creator that are man's inalienable rights, and that make all men equal in his sight." Americans, as leaders of the free world, would have to shoulder the great responsibility of keeping this noble faith alive.

Contrasted with the noble duty of the western forces were the dishonorable principles guiding the communist forces. Following Truman's example, Eisenhower attempted to demonize the Soviets through all rhetorical means possible. Unlike Truman's need to exaggerate the Soviet menace in the 1940s, however, by 1953 the world had seen the real danger communism posed in Korea. Eisenhower merely needed to evoke memories of this war. Within three sentences, for example, he presented the notions that "they tutor men in treason," "they feed upon the hunger of others," and "they torture . . . the truth." Given the efforts the communists were making to spread their ideology, if democratic peoples remained content that communism had not spread to their own soil, they would soon find themselves living under a communist regime as well. This threat, Eisenhower emphasized, was very real.

Eisenhower did not generally make use of enduring metaphors, but he did use metaphors on a smaller scale in his addresses. In introducing the nine principles he believed should guide the United States during his administration, he exercised his role as a national leader to the world, employing a legal/judicial metaphor: "In pleading our just case before the bar of history and in pressing our labor for world peace, we shall be guided by certain fixed

principles.” The first of these principles was to develop powerful military forces, not for any inevitable war but instead to minimize the threat of armed conflict. While this statement sounds distinctly like the words of a wartime general, Eisenhower explained that arms reduction remained a goal, but the United States could not act hastily, or alone, toward this objective. The second principle he delineated addressed maintenance of absolute American ideals: “we shall never try to placate an aggressor by the false and wicked bargain of trading honor for security.” Each principle, beginning with an assertion of an American asset (whether military, economic, political, or otherwise), outlined the western forces’ global responsibility to maintain and, where possible, expand these freedoms. The last principle addressed the United Nations and Eisenhower’s desire that the ideals of this organization guide the global quest for progress. Here, he was acting as a moral leader not only for the United States, but he had assumed a certain degree of world leadership and was attempting to project American ideals onto the international stage.

“Patriotism,” Eisenhower explained, “means equipped forces and a prepared citizenry.” No American in 1953 wished to be labeled anything but a patriot, for the opposite of patriotism at the time was perceived to equal support of communism. In order to keep Americans from becoming apathetic to the situation, or worse, Eisenhower was not afraid to use the ancients’ conception of *pathos* to invoke in his listeners the emotions of shame (if they were not doing their part in the international conflict) and shamelessness⁵ (to which the average citizen could aspire by contributing to the American cause). He made clear that any individual’s failure to work toward what he termed “the practice and fulfillment of our whole faith among ourselves and in our dealings with others” was a failure of the entire system upon which the United States was founded. Only by achieving this goal could “right” triumph over “wrong,” and only in this triumph could the American people truly be confident that their government (a government of the people) would protect them. Through this address, Eisenhower evoked pride in the United States by contrasting American ideals with those of the Soviet Union and by asserting, on behalf of the entire nation, the superiority of the former. Indeed, a real danger was guiding the patriotism he inspired in the people, and Eisenhower, in his first official communication as president, channeled it into one of the most effective

⁵ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 2.2.1-11.1

addresses of his administration, setting a tone he would ultimately fail to maintain in the following eight years.

Eisenhower delivered his second inaugural under very different circumstances from his first: East-West tension still dominated international affairs, but the Korean War no longer plagued the world. If a cold war can be said to exist in the space between war and peace, the world in 1957 had swung a little further toward peace since Eisenhower's first inauguration. This address, therefore, retained certain elements of his first inaugural but had a distinct style of its own to accommodate for the events of the past four years. Its constituent parts have been broken down as follows: opening prayer, discussion of global dangers, statement of purpose, hope for the future, and a closing prayer.⁶ Using this structure, he expressed religious, political, and moral leadership and ended with a return to the kind of religious appeal for which he is known.

As in his first inaugural, Eisenhower began with a short prayer in which he sought God's blessing for the future. Making reference to "the principles and purposes to which we, as a people, are pledged," he asked that the people may possess "right without self-righteousness," "unity without conformity," and "strength without pride in self."⁷ Through these words, he again assured the people that the United States had and would always have divine support. These qualities he sought for the nation were general enough that no one could possibly oppose them, but they were also so general that the audience was not really hearing any new information. Indeed, by the time Eisenhower delivered this address, the Cold War had been occurring for at least a decade (depending on the date one uses as the official beginning), and the standard for Cold War rhetoric was firmly in place. In this speech, he did not contribute to the sense of danger associated with the Cold War as much as he maintained the standard he and Truman had established. By this time, very few new strategic maneuvers could be employed; all presidents, beginning with Eisenhower and continuing for decades, could only continue the tradition that had begun in the wake of the Second World War.

⁶ Martin Medhurst, "President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Second Inaugural Address, 1957," *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993) 175.

⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Second Inaugural Address, January 21, 1957," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1957* (Washington, D.C.: 1958) 60-61. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 60-65.

Given this lack of new developments about which to speak, Eisenhower paid great attention to the recent past, focusing on dangers in order that Americans could come to their own conclusions about the nation's status in the world:

In too much of the earth there is want, discord, danger. New forces and new nations stir and strive across the earth, with power to bring, by their fate, great good or great evil to the free world's future. From the deserts of North Africa to the islands of the South Pacific one-third of all mankind has entered upon an historic struggle for a new freedom: freedom from grinding poverty. Across all continents, nearly a billion people seek, sometimes almost in desperation, for the skills and knowledge and assistance by which they may satisfy from their own resources, the material wants common to all mankind.

No nation, however old or great, escapes this tempest of change and turmoil. Some, impoverished by the recent world war, seek to restore their means of livelihood. In the heart of Europe, Germany still stands tragically divided. So is the whole continent divided. And so, too, all the world.

In these sentences Eisenhower offered little new information to his citizens. Because of the vagueness of the ideas he presented in the address, he could hardly change or strengthen the people's convictions. Most of these words, in fact, could have been uttered by nearly any president, with regard to nearly any situation, in the twentieth century. Even the specific information he offered, such as the detail about Germany's division, was too general to be effective in either informing or persuading his audience. For ten years, the American people had been told by their president in a multitude of ways that "the world of international communism has itself been shaken by a fierce and mighty force: the readiness of men who love freedom to pledge their lives to that love." In this way, he again attempted to act as a moral leader of the United States and, by extension, of the world.

Eisenhower employed a meteorological metaphor in order to reaffirm to his audience that political strife continued to plague the world: "Through the night of their bondage, the unconquerable will of heroes has struck with the swift, sharp thrust of lightning. . . . Thus across all the globe there harshly blow the winds of change. . . . We seek peace, knowing that peace is the climate of freedom. And now, as in no other age, we seek it because we have been warned, by the power of modern weapons, that peace may be the only climate possible for human life itself." In this allusion to atomic weapons, he clearly acted as a moral authority, reminding Americans and Soviets alike that a nuclear war could destroy all life on earth and allowing him to expand on ideals which would promote human survival: justice, law, freedom, hope, and progress.

Despite the effectiveness of these climatic references, many smaller metaphors woven into the speech detract from the strength of any single rhetorical device: “No nation can longer be a fortress, lone and strong and safe. And any people, seeking such shelter for themselves, can now build only their own prison”; “So we voice our hope and our belief that we can help to heal this divided world. Thus may the nations cease to live in trembling before the menace of force. Thus may the weight of fear and the weight of arms be taken from the burdened shoulders of mankind.” Without any single event from which to draw inspiration in the speech, Eisenhower’s second inaugural urged citizens toward many vague ideals without any cohesive, clearly defined problem that the same American genius that had, almost two hundred years earlier, created “a more perfect union” could solve. Thus, this speech addressed many diverse ideas but ultimately lacked the focus characteristic of a great speech.

Later in 1957, several years after “the Supreme Court [had] decided that separate public educational facilities for the races are inherently unequal,”⁸ Eisenhower was charged with the tremendous responsibility of enforcing the Court’s edict. The Governor of Arkansas had opposed the Court’s ruling and used the Arkansas National Guard to prevent black students from entering Central High School. Eisenhower sent an Army unit to Little Rock to oppose the National Guard and allow desegregation to begin. Clearly, his use of the Federal troops was in line with both the spirit and the letter of the law, but because civil rights was still a contentious issue, especially in the South, the President focused on the pure letter of the law as the Court had established and as the Constitution mandated. The use of constitutional constructs in defense of a president’s actions, reminiscent of Abraham Lincoln’s during the Civil War, incorporates more formal elements of rhetoric that are rarely employed to the degree Eisenhower used in this address.

In asserting, “I could have spoken from Rhode Island, where I have been staying recently, but I felt that, in speaking from the house of Lincoln, of Jackson, and of Wilson, my words would better convey both the sadness I feel in the action I was compelled today to take and the firmness with which I intend to pursue this course until the orders of the Federal Court at Little Rock can be executed without unlawful interference,” Eisenhower both established the legitimacy of his leadership and implied that he was indeed “compelled” to take action

⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Radio and Television Address to the American People on the Situation in Little Rock, September 24, 1957,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1958) 690. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 689-94.

against the injustices in Arkansas. In one sentence, he evoked first the White House and the associated symbolism of the presidency and, second, the responsibilities of this office as binding him to the Constitution. He continued: “Whenever normal agencies prove inadequate to the task and it becomes necessary for the Executive Branch of the Federal Government to use its powers and authority to uphold Federal Courts, the President’s responsibility is inescapable.” Moreover, he explained, personal opinions could not affect the Court’s decision, and his hands, like those of all other just lawmakers and enforcers, were tied. With such an emotional issue as desegregation, Eisenhower understood that it was best simply to begin by claiming his absolute obligation to act as he had; only later in the address could he begin, subtly, to make a moral argument for the decency of his actions.

Contrasting those communities that had begun to take steps toward integrating schools with others, including Little Rock, that had not, he suggested that the former group were the heroes—a subtle shift toward proclaiming the moral rightness of desegregation—before again stating that “both the law and the national interest demanded that the President take action.” This line of reasoning continued intermittently throughout the address, but as the speech progressed, Eisenhower began to make an appeal to democracy as supporting such notions as absolute equality in schooling: “Our enemies are gloating over this incident and using it everywhere to misrepresent our whole nation. We are portrayed as a violator of those standards of conduct which the peoples of the world united to proclaim in the Charter of the United Nations. There they affirmed ‘faith in fundamental human rights’ and ‘in the dignity and worth of the human person’ and they did so ‘without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.’” Last, he mentioned that the reputation of Little Rock had been blemished by this incident, and only by reversing the damage the “leadership of demagogic extremists” had done could “be restored the image of America and all of its parts as one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Closing with the last few words of the Pledge of Allegiance, Eisenhower reminded his audience one last time of the ideals no American—not even the “demagogic extremists” themselves—would deny. Thus, by the end of the address, he had made reference to the White House, the Constitution, the Charter of the U.N., and the Pledge (and evoked the Declaration of Independence, which Americans generally compartmentalize with the Constitution), all of which serve his purpose of reminding the nation of what it truly stands for. Seldom do modern presidential addresses ground their speeches so deeply in formal, logical arguments;

Eisenhower's Little Rock speech is a rare example of the kind of rhetorical strategy characteristic of Jefferson's or Lincoln's era.

While exceptional speeches such as Eisenhower's statement regarding the situation in Little Rock are often dynamically composed and effectively delivered, state of the union addresses often read more like laundry lists interspersed with small bits of ideology; in this respect, Ike was no exception. His 1959 state of the union, delivered with only two years remaining in his administration, began with a straightforward statement of the objective of annual messages in general, as well as the specific goal guiding this one: "This is the moment when Congress and the Executive annually begin their cooperative work to build a better America. One basic purpose unites us: To promote strength and security, side by side with liberty and opportunity."⁹ Beginning his speech by describing the two branches of government in the third person, he quickly shifted to an ambiguous use of the first person plural ("us") to include, if listeners chose to interpret in this way, the government as well as all Americans.¹⁰ This is the meaning many patriotic citizens likely assigned to the words; regardless of a person's interpretation, it was clear that the United States under Eisenhower would continue to strive toward the same goals that had been driving it, as well as those that had led Truman's administration into the Cold War. Additionally, the theme of the address, which soon became apparent, seemed to build on the Truman Doctrine: All that was good for the United States was good for the world because the U.S. needed to be strong—economically, politically, militarily, morally, and in all other respects—in order to support the peace and stability of other nations.

The body of the speech opened with the blatantly pro-democracy question, "Can Government based upon liberty and the God-given rights of man, permanently endure when ceaselessly challenged by a dictatorship, hostile to our mode of life, and controlling an economic and military power of great and growing strength?" Because it was obviously unnecessary to answer this question for his American audience, he proceeded to praise "the devotion, the vision, the courage and the fortitude" of the people of the United States. This technique of celebrating Americans and their country seems more characteristic of inaugural

⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Annual Address to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 9, 1959," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1959* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960) 5. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 5-18.

¹⁰ Hinkley 39-46.

addresses, which are by their nature more ceremonial, yet Eisenhower's strategy of directly addressing the people meant that he could make more appeals to patriotism and to the nation's status as an international superpower.

From the suggestion that the United States had an incredible capacity to wage war, he highlighted the desire not for war, but for peace. He accomplished this goal through many approaches, among which was the assertion that "[t]o achieve this peace we seek to prevent war at any place and in any dimension." He thus indicated that Americans' ability to make war could be better put to use in the form of an ability to prevent war—quite a statement coming from a general. His summation of the status of the country's military strength, though, was more typical of a general: American military might is unmatched anywhere in the world, yet billions of dollars must be still invested in the armament of the United States. This proposition served the dual purpose of reminding citizens of the perilous situation that continued to plague the world while also addressing Congress, Eisenhower's most immediate physical audience (although his words were clearly directed at all Americans), and suggesting a budgetary issue his administration believed would be a priority in the coming year.

In the second major point of the address, Eisenhower stated that, as a means of ensuring the safety and stability of the United States and thus of the world, economic stability also needed to be a focus of the Congress. Presumably, these emphases did not vary considerably from the "state of the union" in previous years. However, the nation had begun to recover from a mild recession, and on the eve of a new decade, Eisenhower wished to strengthen the economy further to match the increases in quality of life he believed were within reach of Americans. "Unless we *progress*, we *regress* [emphasis in original]," he said, and this progress would have to include the realms of social, political, economic, educational, and professional advancement. With a straightforward use of antithesis, he noted that the United States "can afford everything we clearly need, but we cannot afford one cent of waste." Clearly speaking to Congress again, he continued to discuss specific ways in which the nation must carefully balance its fiscal priorities. As with the use of "we," presidents can alter meanings significantly by shifting from addressing one particular audience to another; unless one listens for this phenomenon, it is difficult to discern, and the address flows seamlessly while serving many purposes. Returning once more to the people, he stated, "I shall submit a balanced budget for the next year, a year expected to be the most prosperous in our history. It is a realistic budget with wholly attainable objectives." These "wholly attainable objectives,"

Eisenhower implied, would only be defeated by an uncaring, self-interested Congress, and the people thus knew that any failure to balance the budget would be the fault of a partisan, uncompromising legislature. Listing several more proposals he was making to Congress through this very address (although he referred to this body in the third person while ostensibly speaking to the people), he made announcements such as the following: "I shall ask Congress to amend the Employment Act of 1946" Although this address was originally created as a means for the president to speak to the legislature, Eisenhower clearly believed that his true responsibility was to address the people. In standing before the nation's senators and representatives and telling *citizens* that he was requesting something of Congress, he was effectively making that request understood. At a later date he would, of course, make a formal proposal to Congress, but for the moment, even members of Congress would have to listen to the speech in their capacity as citizens.

Clearly, Eisenhower perceived the state of the union as serving a purpose beyond the constitutional mandate that "from time to time [the president shall] give to Congress information on the state of the union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." What, though, was this end he sought? Truman, building on the rhetorical strategies employed by FDR and even Teddy Roosevelt, had made the Cold War a war of words; Eisenhower, too, utilized this approach in his effort to keep the Cold War from becoming any "hotter" than it had been in Korea. Even after a fairly lengthy passage about specific fiscal considerations that he would present to Congress, he reiterated that his efforts and those of the legislature needed to serve a greater interest: that of world peace and democracy.

After addressing the role of the American economy in the bipolar world, he said, "I take up next certain aspects of our international situation and our programs to strengthen it." Although he had already been discussing the "international situation," he wanted to alert his listeners that he was shifting his focus directly onto American defense. Again, the security of the United States depended on the security of the world, and the United States had a vital role to play in securing the safety of the world. He began by stating that what he called a "Fortress America" (reminiscent of his second inaugural) could no longer exist: "If ever we were reduced to the isolation implied by that term, we would occupy a prison, not a fortress. The question whether we can afford to help other nations that want to defend their freedom but cannot fully do so from their own means, has only one answer: we can and we must, we have

been doing so since 1947.” In reality, however, the United States had been devoted to defending the freedom of the world since the beginning of its involvement in World War II in 1942. Citing 1947—the year of Truman’s speech advocating American support of Turkey and Greece against communist forces—reinforced the fact that the Cold War itself had already lasted for at least twelve years and that the United States must persevere until communism was defeated.

The last major point in his address began with the assertion that “America is best described by one word, freedom.” Building on the notion of freedom he had evoked by contrasting it with communism, he returned to national politics, announcing his intention of recommending legislation designed to protect American workers. His discussion of civil rights was limited to one paragraph, which stated simply that progress was being made and needed to continue. This minimal focus on a problem of such importance in 1959 made the rights of millions of Americans seem like nothing more than an afterthought and detracted from the continuity of the address, which soon returned to issues of more global magnitude, including the United Nations and the International Court of Justice.

In concluding this annual message, Eisenhower again recalled the Truman Doctrine but adopted the language of the address announcing the Marshall Plan: “We seek victory—not over any nation or people—but over the ancient enemies of us all; victory over ignorance, poverty, disease, and human degradation wherever they may be found” (Marshall had stated, “Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos.”). Eleven years after the Marshall Plan was conceived to oppose communism, the enemy remained the same. Finally, making reference to American ideals as described almost two centuries earlier in the Declaration of Independence, he said that “[i]f we make ourselves worthy of America’s ideals, if we do not forget that our nation was founded on the premise that all men are creatures of God’s making, the world will come to know that it is great men who carry forward the true promise of human progress and dignity.” As the Cold War had already demonstrated to the world, some endeavors are not simply about winning or losing. American citizens could not simply assume that they were “worthy”; ideals eternally necessitate that the people strive toward them.

In January 1961, after eight years in office, Eisenhower said farewell to the American people. Unlike many other farewell addresses—but rather like Washington’s in that it warned against following a possible political path in the future—Eisenhower’s focused on the need for

balance in the White House, in the federal government, and in the United States in the years to come. Beginning with a brief history of his involvement as a political leader, he asserted that he and the Congress had been “mutually interdependent” during his presidency, alluding to the balance of powers prescribed by the Constitution. Characteristic of epideictic address, this speech praised the nation; it did so, however, in a way that introduced his recommendations for the future of the country: “America’s leadership and prestige depend, not merely upon our unmatched material progress, riches, and military strength, but on how we use our power in the interests of world peace and human betterment.”¹¹

Reminiscent of his “Atoms for Peace” speech of 1954, this thesis was present throughout the address. Although Eisenhower deferred briefly to typical Cold War rhetoric (i.e., “noble goals” versus “a hostile ideology”) for a few minutes, the majority of his time speaking went toward countering the notion that the Soviet Union was a dangerous force that could only be controlled by American production of increasing amounts of weapons. Indeed, he argued, with regard to the Soviet Union, “threats, new in kind or degree, constantly arise,” but “[g]ood judgment seeks balance and progress; lack of it eventually finds imbalance and frustration.”

Speaking as commander-in chief—even as “General Ike”—he stated, “A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction.” He continued, citing figures about how great the “defense establishment” was before stating that “we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex” and expressing his concern that “[t]he potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.” Because the American people had been hearing for years about the Soviet threat, Eisenhower wished to present realities the people had perhaps not yet considered. He perceived a potential threat from this “military-industrial complex,” and to keep the United States from destroying itself from within, he needed to express this concern to the public in a way that would cause them to stop and consider new aspects of the situation. “We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. . . . Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry

¹¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Farewell Radio and Television Address to the American People, January 17, 1961,” *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1961* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961) 1037. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 1035-40.

can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.” Whereas Truman’s address announcing the advent of the atomic bomb lauded the technology as a “marvel,” a “unique success,” and even “the greatest achievement of organized science in history,” in his farewell address Eisenhower was attempting to curb the unconditional support the people had developed for military spending as synonymous with commitment to democracy.¹² In mentioning the citizens, Eisenhower was calling them to action, entrusting them with the responsibility of maintaining the precious equilibrium between government assurance of adequate defense and government domination of universities and other research facilities.

This issue of balance, presented so concretely by Eisenhower, would prove difficult to ignore. Eisenhower, giving the last public address of his presidency, knew that the nation was facing a turbulent future, and he emphasized that “we—you and I, and our government—must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow.” Disarmament, Eisenhower explained, was “a continuing imperative,” but one which most American leaders already embraced; in the coming years, the decision to pursue this course would rest with the Soviets. Nevertheless, maintaining a desire for such action was the responsibility of all Americans. Speaking “as a private citizen,” Eisenhower said that he would “never cease to do what little I can to help the world advance along that road,” and in these words could be found inspiration for all other citizens.

In concluding his farewell address, Eisenhower gave a short prayer to the nation, followed by a longer one “to all the peoples of the world”: “We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings . . .” The address, and thus Eisenhower’s presidency, ended with the notion of “mutual respect and love.” While many elements of this address suggested the notion of civil rights (discussion of the ideals the United States was known for supporting, as well as the more explicit reference in the closing prayer), Eisenhower never directly spoke about this issue in his farewell address. Indeed, the entire speech could have been about civil

¹² Philip Wander, *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, and Ideology* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1997) 174-75.

rights, but as he had instead chosen to speak about the dangers posed by the American defense industry, he was perhaps wise to focus uniquely on this issue as commander-in-chief and concluding his administration on a very presidential note.

Symbolism in the presidency ranges from precedents set by Washington to new symbols created by any given president, but the most effective are often those that give new meaning to old notions. Eisenhower's use of symbolism was rarely novel, but it was generally effective in evoking an image of the presidency that transcended his own administration. He understood how to draw on almost two centuries of presidential symbolism to become not just one man in the White House, but to portray himself as another in a string of great American leaders. However, effective symbolism does not necessarily equal effective leadership, for symbols generally do little more than create a feeling (such as patriotism) in the minds of their recipients; a president's purpose must be more fully developed toward a specific goal (generally, of shaping attitudes and beliefs, not merely sentiments) if he is to succeed in effecting permanent change. Indeed, in Eisenhower's case (as with many more recent presidents), his use of symbolism was perhaps more adept than his leadership, causing a disconnect with the people, who wanted to believe that he was on par with truly great leaders but who could find no tangible evidence of such greatness.

V. JOHN F. KENNEDY AND LYNDON B. JOHNSON:

PRESIDENCY LITERATURE APPLIED TO RHETORIC

Presidents, like their rhetoric, can be good or bad, bold or timid, effective or ineffective. Because modern presidential leadership can be interpreted as consisting largely of rhetoric,¹ it would follow that speeches can be judged in much the same way as the presidents who deliver them. As the study of presidential rhetoric is considerably newer than that of the presidency, there exists relatively little scholarship on the words of the president (and virtually no basis for evaluation of speeches). Research on the presidency abounds, however, and much of this work can be applied equally to a president's communication with the American people.

Thomas Langston examined the relationship between the president and the people in his 1995 book *With Reverence and Contempt: How Americans Think About Their President*. As the title implies, this relationship is a complex one and depends on a plethora of factors, many of which are unrelated to the president himself. When both experts and average citizens are asked to rate presidents, their top three choices are almost invariably Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and George Washington; "[a]ll were presidents whose most famous acts in office were achieved through the exercise of prerogative powers," Langston observed.² As prerogative powers derive from a necessity's presenting itself (often as a result of an emergency or crisis), it is logical that the president who serves during the greatest crisis simply has the greatest opportunity to impress the nation through his exercise of these powers. While a president who faces a crisis will not necessarily rise to the occasion (either in words or in deeds), without such emergency situations his profound leadership capabilities would go unnoticed. Similarly, smaller crises allow presidents' rhetorical greatness to show through the speeches they deliver in response to them; in this way a natural disaster or an act of terrorism could increase a president's standing in the eyes of the public.

In addition to external, situational influences on presidential greatness, the personality of the individual occupying the White House understandably has a noticeable impact on the impression a president ultimately gives. Political scientist James David Barber, in his 1985

¹ Jeffrey Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987).

² Thomas Langston, *With Reverence and Contempt: How Americans Think About Their President* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) 100.

book *The Presidential Character*, explored ways to judge the character of presidents and presidential candidates, concluding that the relevant distinctions are positive/negative outlook and active/passive leadership style. Given that most presidents are active in their leadership (Barber identified only five “passive” chief executives over the last eight decades),³ the positive/negative dichotomy is the more interesting for further investigation. In the context of presidents’ rhetoric, because their words and actions are inextricably intertwined, it is likely that the speeches of presidents who have positive attitudes toward their job are more optimistic in nature than those of “negative” presidents, which can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of an address.

A myriad of other works have examined countless additional aspects of the presidency, and many of these books apply equally to presidential rhetoric. Richard Neustadt, author of *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, observed that presidential power is, simply, the power to persuade: “The essence of a President’s persuasive task, with congressmen and everybody else, is to induce them to believe that what he wants of them is what their own appraisal of their own responsibilities requires them to do in their interest, not his.”⁴ Further, Neustadt also “states that a modern president faces demands from five constituencies: executive officials, Congress, partisans, the public, and people abroad, particularly leaders of other nations”⁵; this statement suggests that, in ostensibly speaking to “the people,” he is often addressing one or more of these constituencies (as Truman did, for instance, in his announcement of the bombing of Hiroshima).

While these are only a few examples of presidency scholarship that relate directly to the field of presidential rhetoric, they demonstrate the uniformity with which such works can be used to gain insight into public addresses. Questions relating to the presence or absence of a crisis, a president’s handling of such a situation, the individual’s personality, and his sheer persuasiveness can provide insight into his rhetorical achievements and failures. In the case of John F. Kennedy, the most striking aspect of his presidency (besides his untimely death) was his youthful optimism, which allowed him to forge a connection with people across the nation.

³ James Barber, *The Presidential Character*, rev. ed. (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1992), as qtd. in Thomas E. Cronin and Michael A. Genovese, *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 35.

⁴ Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: The Free Press, 1990) 40.

⁵ Meena Bose, “Words as Signals: Drafting Cold War Rhetoric in the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations,” *Congress and the Presidency* vol. 25, no. 1 spring 1998: 23.

This positive attitude toward his role as president contrasted sharply with his successor's failure to reach the people, largely due to the negativity and cynicism that would eventually destroy him.

JFK began his term in office on January 20, 1961 with the following words: "We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end as well as a beginning—signifying renewal as well as change."⁶ Theodore Sorensen, who contributed to John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, explained that inaugurals (in general, but Kennedy's in particular) were designed "to address the American people of our time but have meaning for all people for all time. For they embody the best of our heritage from the past and the best of our hopes for the future."⁷ Although he began with vague references to the future, Kennedy would soon live up to Sorensen's assessment of the address. He evoked the Founders before examining the ways in which the world had changed since their time, always balancing the mention of a risk or hardship with the promise of prosperity, freedom, and other such ideals. The wording he employed—"to assure the survival and the success of liberty," "those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free," and "let us begin anew," among other examples—set the tone for the administration he was bringing to the service of the nation. Not only did liberty survive the trials it experienced, it succeeded and flourished; likewise, as he said earlier in the speech, the United States not only withstood the "hard and bitter peace" of the Cold War, but Americans were "disciplined" by it. JFK's almost Rooseveltian language, conspicuously devoid of the darker images characteristic of FDR's discourse, complemented the youthful, energetic persona the American people had come to know and admire.

Even when Kennedy was compelled to discuss more serious matters (as was often the case; responding to the Soviet Union had been a major responsibility of the American president since Truman's administration), his addresses retained their distinct Kennedy flavor: "To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge *our best efforts to help them help themselves*, for whatever period is required—not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but *because it is right* [emphasis added]." Instead of saying, "we pledge to help them," he made

⁶ John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1962) 1. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 1-3.

clear his intention to do the very best he could to help them in becoming self-sufficient. While reminding the public that “[a]ll this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days . . . ,” he focused on that fact that his goals would, someday, be accomplished: “. . . But let us begin.”

In attempting to persuade American citizens of the need to “begin,” he reminded them that throughout history, “only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger.” Furthermore, he explained, he did not fear a future test of his commitment to democracy; he would embrace the opportunity. He was not afraid of the future that he, as president, would have to face; the people, whose role would be infinitely less direct but utterly essential to victory, should not “shrink from this responsibility” either. The end of the inaugural, which contains some of the best-known passages of American presidential address, relied heavily on Kennedy’s magnetic personality for its inspirational qualities. Because of the persona he radiated, JFK was able to unify the people around an image of America in which they all wished to believe. The sentence after his celebrated antitheses, all but forgotten since it was uttered, read, “Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you.” In these twenty-nine words, Kennedy implored the people of the world to strive toward a moral standard that had almost been lost during World War II and the Cold War, when nations had been forced to focus their attention inward. Ending the address with a short prayer, JFK conveyed a final image of morality characteristic of America’s earlier moral leader. As the first Catholic president of the United States, Kennedy needed to conform precisely to all precedents regarding religious appeals in speeches in order to allay the fears of those who had opposed a Catholic in the White House.

As his presidency proceeded and his Catholicism became less of an issue, JFK was able to concentrate even more on customizing his presidency and his rhetoric. At American University in 1963, he presented the Soviet Union not as the detestable nation most Americans believed it to be, but instead as a nation of people who, like Americans, wished to avoid war at all costs. Soviets, like Americans, were caught in a “vicious and dangerous cycle in which suspicion on one side breeds suspicion on the other, and new weapons beget

⁷ Robert E. Denton, Jr., foreword, *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents*, ed. Halford Ryan, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993) xi.

counterweapons.”⁸ Neither nation desired war, Kennedy explained, but each felt compelled by the other to participate fully in the arms race. Thus, while acknowledging the differences between these two countries, he sought to present the Soviet Union as a nation not unlike the United States—indeed, one with whom American leaders could negotiate to the benefit of both sides. This notion had best been encapsulated two years earlier in his inaugural address: “Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us.”

As was the case with his presidential leadership, JFK’s popular rhetoric emphasized the positive, but he was not afraid to address the shortcomings of the United States. It was in this spirit that he said in the American University speech, “But I also believe that we must reexamine our own attitude—as individuals and as a Nation—for our attitude is as essential as theirs.” The address continued with four main points, each delineating one way in which the American people needed to reexamine their attitudes. First, with regard to the institution of peace: “Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many of us think it unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief. . . . We need not accept that view.” Second, JFK sought to correct the fallacy that the Soviets desired war: “both the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies, have a mutually deep interest in a just and genuine peace and in halting the arms race. . . . So, let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved.” Third, he said, “Let us reexamine our attitude toward the cold war, remembering that we are not engaged in a debate, seeking to pile up debating points.” It was not, JFK argued, simply a “war of words” but instead something much more serious, and its resolution needed to be sought in the same manner in which one would attempt to establish a cease-fire in a “hot” war. Then, somewhat in contradiction with his earlier statements, JFK asserted that “the Communist drive to impose their political and economic system on others is the primary cause of world tension today.” After stating that the Soviet Union was perhaps not as evil as it had been portrayed, he needed to remind his audience that American efforts could only do so much; ultimately, the Soviets had started the problem, and ultimately, they would have to be the driving force in ending it.

⁸ John F. Kennedy, “Commencement Address at American University, June 10, 1963,” *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964) 462. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 459-64.

The most meaningful way in which the USSR could prove its desire to end the conflict was through arms reduction measures, Kennedy explained. After years of attempting to reach international agreements on disarmament, “one major area of these negotiations where the end is in sight, yet where a fresh start is badly needed, is in a treaty to outlaw nuclear tests.” He elaborated on this plan:

The conclusion of such a treaty, so near and yet so far, would check the spiraling arms race in one of its most dangerous areas. It would place the nuclear powers in a position to deal more effectively with one of the greatest hazards which man faces in 1963, the further spread of nuclear arms. It would increase our security—it would decrease the prospects of war. Surely this goal is sufficiently important to require our steady pursuit, yielding neither to temptation to give up the whole effort nor the temptation to give up our insistence on vital and responsible safeguards.

The effectiveness of this statement relied on one main assumption. Saying that fewer weapons would reduce the chances of war would have been accurate in a pre-nuclear world, but in a world where one atomic bomb could be more devastating than an entire “traditional” war, this was no longer the case: the more nuclear weapons the U.S. and the USSR stockpiled, the more clear it became that they could never be detonated. The average American listening to the speech would not be aware of this fact, however, and Kennedy’s commitment to protecting the safety of his citizens was an apt lead-in to his announcement that, agreement or not, the United States had decided not to conduct nuclear tests in the atmosphere as long as no other nation did. “We will not be the first to resume,” he added, aiming this comment as much at the Soviets as at his American audience.

After that announcement of policy, Kennedy stated the last of his main points of the speech: “let us examine our attitude toward peace and freedom here at home.” Here lay the classic Cold War argument for equality for all Americans and against hypocrisy. However, instead of delving into the issue of civil rights, he said only that it was clear that the United States was dedicated to freedom and equality for all; “our national interests” were congruous with “human interests.” In conclusion, JFK stated that “[t]he United States, as the world knows [his obvious meaning here was, *as the USSR knows*], will never start a war. We do not want a war. We do not now expect a war. This generation of Americans has already had enough—more than enough—of war and hate and oppression.” While “we shall be prepared if others wish it,” in his conclusion Kennedy emphasized “a world of peace where the weak are

safe and the strong are just”—where all peoples could work together to form “a strategy of peace.”

The next evening, Kennedy was compelled to give a radio and television report on civil rights. Focusing, as Eisenhower had, on a recent desegregation problem in Alabama that had required military intervention to remedy, Kennedy quickly returned to the necessity of attaining true democracy at home in order to defend it around the world: “Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Viet-Nam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. . . .” According to Kennedy, the heroes of the situation that had taken place at the University of Alabama—those who had truly attempted to promote “American” ideals—were the students of that university, and the president was quick to commend their efforts.

JFK had a keen sense of how to relate to the younger generations of the United States in the early 1960s. He thus made frequent appeals to those who represented the future of the nation, as in his American University commencement address: “President Woodrow Wilson once said that every man sent out from a university should be a man of his nation as well as a man of his time, and I am confident that the men and women who carry the honor of graduating from this institution will continue to give from their lives, from their talents, a high measure of public service and public support.” After two-and-a-half years of Kennedy’s inspiring leadership, these graduates likely felt more than a slight desire to live up to his expectations. The previous year, in his 1962 state of the union address, JFK had devoted considerable attention to education, among many other policy recommendations. Supplementing his argument with hard facts and statistics characteristic of most state of the union addresses, he also employed quotations by H.G. Wells (“Civilization is the race between education and catastrophe”) and Woodrow Wilson (“I believe in democracy because it releases the energy of every human being”)⁹ in order to demonstrate the importance of education. In requesting that the Congress consider a specific proposal for federal aid to schools, Kennedy was also imploring the average citizens in his audience to contemplate the connection between education and democracy. This president was thus capable of

⁹ John F. Kennedy, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 11, 1962,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963) 9. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 5-15.

transforming even the state of the union speech into an opportunity to summon the American spirit that had been instilled in the people two centuries before.

Because of his youth and his charisma, Kennedy easily achieved a goal toward which all American presidents strive in their addresses, and this ability to relate to the people would prove indispensable throughout the rest of his presidency. In his civil rights address of June 11, 1963, he constructed his argument for civil rights around two basic premises: first, that the United States had become the moral leader of the world during the Cold War, and second, that the distinction between white Americans and black Americans was purely artificial. He conveyed this latter point in the first few sentences of the address, in which he explained the situation in Alabama: “. . . the presence of Alabama National Guardsmen was required on the University of Alabama to carry out the final and unequivocal order of the United States District Court of the Northern District of Alabama. That order called for the admission of two clearly qualified young Alabama residents who happened to have been born Negro.”¹⁰ By downplaying the fact that the two students in question were black, JFK suggested the absurdity of differentiating between whites and blacks; his tone conveyed his expectation that, by 1963, Americans should have been enlightened enough to know that skin color was of no more consequence than eye color or shoe size. He continued, citing statistics about blacks’ minimal educational opportunities, career prospects, and even life expectancy.

Kennedy then discussed what kind of issue civil rights was *not*. It was not, he explained, a sectional issue, a partisan issue, a legal issue, or even a legislative issue. The nation, he continued, was “confronted primarily with a moral issue.” No longer was civil rights something to be justified as simply “the law,” as Eisenhower had done in his Little Rock address. After mentioning the American Constitution and evoking the Declaration of Independence (and even paraphrasing the Golden Rule), JFK presented posed the following question: “If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?” He then stated that “the time has come for this Nation to fulfill its

¹⁰ John F. Kennedy, “Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights, June 11, 1963,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964) 468. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 468-71.

promise.” This promise, delineated in such documents as the Constitution and the Declaration, had thus remained unfulfilled throughout the previous two centuries. If the United States did not truly guarantee freedom, equality, liberty, or other stereotypically “American” ideals to all of its citizens, then Kennedy could not see the situation as anything but a moral crisis, and a moral crisis could only be addressed adequately if the nation as a whole reevaluated its morals.

While no law could solve the civil rights crisis, JFK had in mind certain legislation that could ease the struggle for those most hurt by it. In that spirit he proposed “legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public—hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments. This seems to me to be an elementary right,” he said, “Its denial is an arbitrary indignity that no American in 1963 should have to endure, but many do.” Again, Kennedy made a point in this address that few Americans before him had been willing to make: skin color is, for all intents and purposes, arbitrary and should be accepted as such.

Returning to those who had already embraced this ideal, he said, “I want to pay tribute to those citizens North and South who have been working in their communities to make life better for all. They are acting not out of a sense of legal duty but out of a sense of human decency. . . . I salute them for their honor and their courage.” True, he was praising citizens who had taken strides to alleviate the “moral crisis,” but more important, he was making a positive example of those with this “sense of human decency” in hopes that they would inspire other Americans to support civil rights as well.

Instead of merely using occasions such as his inauguration and the American University commencement—which both clearly required epideictic rhetoric—as opportunities to contemplate and celebrate American ideals (as so many presidents before him had done), JFK asked his audience to join him in this celebration. Moreover, at times he urged the people toward rhetorical action, as in the inaugural: “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country. . . .”; “Let us begin.” The following year, his state of the union message began with “This week we begin anew our joint and separate efforts to build the American future.” In the American University address, he turned the phrase “let us begin” into an anaphora that lent continuity and a theme to his four main points, and indeed to his presidency. At the end of the 1962 state of the union, he said, reminiscent of the “first hundred days/first thousand days” passage of his inaugural, “We will

not reach that goal today, or tomorrow. We may not reach it in our own lifetime. But the quest is the greatest adventure of our century. . . .”

When Kennedy was assassinated—after fewer than one thousand days in the White House—Lyndon B. Johnson stepped forth to take the presidential oath in a moment of national crisis. This man, who clearly possessed a different leadership style from Kennedy, wisely opted to preserve many elements of the former president’s administration in order to ease the nation in its time of mourning. The most obvious way of achieving this goal was through symbolic means, and among the symbolic means available, the most immediate was Kennedy’s rhetoric. Thus, when Johnson delivered his first speech to the Congress only days after the assassination, his first sentence memorialized JFK (“All I have I would have given gladly not to be standing here today”¹¹), and the theme of the address built on Kennedy’s “let us begin” anaphora (indeed, LBJ cited these three words in his speech): “Today, in this moment of new resolve, I would say to all my fellow Americans, let us continue.”

Although Johnson’s personality generally contrasted with Kennedy’s—Barber describes Johnson as an active-*negative* type—the new president made an effort to assure the Congress, and consequently the American people, that this new administration would serve as a continuation of Camelot. Toward this goal, the first lines of this address emphasized the nation’s great sorrow: “The greatest leader of our time has been struck down by the foulest deed of our time. . . . No words are sad enough to express our sense of loss.” He continued, suggesting certain objectives for his presidency: “No words are strong enough to express our determination to continue the forward thrust of America that he began. . . . And now the ideas and the ideals which he so nobly represented must and will be translated into effective action.”

Because Johnson knew that, only days after Kennedy’s death, he could not proceed with a discussion of new policy issues on which he wished to focus, he relied heavily on glorification of America’s beloved Kennedy, stating that “[u]nder John Kennedy’s leadership, this Nation has demonstrated that it has the courage to seek peace, and it has the fortitude to risk war. . . . This nation will keep its commitments from South Viet-Nam to West Berlin.”

¹¹ “Address before a joint session of the Congress, November 27, 1963,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965) 8. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 8-10.

Every declaration Johnson made needed to be in the context of continuing JFK's policies and principles.

Further into the address, Johnson turned to discussion of himself—but only for long enough to bring the topic back to America and to the ideals embraced by all Americans and championed by the slain president:

For 32 years Capitol Hill has been my home. I have shared many moments of pride with you, pride in the ability of the Congress of the United States to act, to meet any crisis, to distill from our differences strong programs of national action.

An assassin's bullet has thrust upon me the awesome burden of the Presidency. I am here today to say I need your help; I cannot bear this burden alone. I need the help of all Americans, and all America. This Nation has experienced a profound shock, and in this critical moment, it is our duty, yours and mine, as the Government of the United States, to do away with uncertainty and doubt and delay and to show that we are capable of decisive action; that from the brutal loss of our leader we will derive not weakness, but strength; that we can and will act and act now.

Johnson did not necessarily believe all that he said about Kennedy's greatness; indeed, Johnson had always expected that he would someday rise to the presidency (though preferably through different means), and with or without an assassin's bullet, he was confident that he was equal to the task. Understanding the people's devotion to Kennedy and their fear that his death would change the course of the nation, LBJ sought to provide as much stability as he could, rededicating the United States "to the unswerving support of the United Nations, to the honorable and determined execution of our commitment to our allies, to the maintenance of military strength second to none, to the defense of the strength and stability of the dollar, to the expansion of our foreign trade, to the reinforcement of our programs of mutual assistance and cooperation in Asia and Africa, and to our Alliance for Progress in this hemisphere."

After citing two sentences from Kennedy's first inaugural address and making his celebrated "let us continue" statement, Johnson finally gave in to the overwhelming urge to discuss policy while he had the attention of the entire Congress. "No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long," he began before turning entirely to the "moral issue"¹² into which Kennedy had turned civil rights: "We have talked long enough

¹² Kennedy "Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights, June 11, 1963" 468.

in this country about civil rights. We have talked for one hundred years or more. It is time now to write the next chapter, and to write it in the books of law. I urge you again, as I did in 1957 and again in 1960, to enact a civil rights law so that we can move forward to eliminate from this Nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race or color.” While Johnson could have reminded the members of Congress that *Kennedy* had supported such measures in previous years, mentioning his own support of civil rights bills revealed the strength of his convictions that such a law was absolutely necessary. This lapse likely went unnoticed, however, because Johnson quickly led into a second issue (a tax bill) whose passage Kennedy had been endorsing throughout 1963.

Johnson began to conclude this address with much of the same kind of language with which he had opened:

In short, this is no time for delay. It is a time for action—strong, forward-looking action on the pending education bills to help bring the light of learning to every home and hamlet in America—strong, forward-looking action on youth employment opportunities; strong, forward-looking action on the pending foreign aid bill, making clear that we are not forfeiting our responsibilities to this hemisphere or to the world, nor erasing Executive flexibility in the conduct of our foreign affairs—and strong, prompt, and forward-looking action on the remaining appropriation bills.

Succeeding a president as popular (and downright likeable) as Kennedy had been, LBJ knew that the people would not simply shift their affection onto a new president; he could not claim a mandate from the people. For that reason, he was careful not to assume popular support in his first few public speaking engagements. Instead, he was very direct in asking the people not only to support him, but also to assist him in the great tasks that lay ahead: “The need is here. The need is now. I ask your help.” (The next day, in an address to the nation, he repeated this plea: “I come before you to ask your help I ask you to join me”¹³) Still unsure of his ability to rouse the nation from its grief, Johnson concluded his first address to Congress with his wishes for his administration: “I profoundly hope that the tragedy and the torment of these terrible days will bind us together in new fellowship, making us one people in our hour of sorrow. So let us here highly resolve that John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not live—

¹³ Jyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s Thanksgiving Day Address to the Nation, November 28, 1963,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965) 11.

or die—in vain.” Thus, this address began and ended with images of Kennedy, whose presidency undeniably created the basis for Johnson’s speech on November 27, 1963.

Because of its sensitivity and subtlety, this address was atypical for LBJ. A large, imposing man, Johnson had had a long career in Congress and was used to achieving his objectives through somewhat less delicate means than he employed in the days and weeks after Kennedy’s death. Certainly, the circumstances called for compassion and a true “mourner-in-chief” soothing the nation,¹⁴ and the new president displayed incredible self-restraint in focusing the address on Kennedy—even three days after taking the presidential oath, Johnson had grand designs for the nation. With such plans, he apparently could not resist beginning almost immediately with those elements Kennedy had been promoting (and those he knew he could exploit the sympathy vote in order to attain).

In the months after he took office, Johnson began to ease out of Kennedy’s shadow. Although LBJ’s personality and attitude toward the presidency could not compare with his predecessor’s eternal optimism, the new president had a sense of vision unparalleled by any president since FDR. Shortly before the Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which was still considered Kennedy’s bill), he started to work toward his own vision of America, presenting a framework for his plans at the University of Michigan in May 1964. In this address, he used the traditional commencement theme of the future to discuss ways of making the nation a better place for generations to come:

The challenge of the next half-century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth and to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization.

Your imagination, your initiative, and your indignation will determine whether we build a society where progress is the servant of our needs, or a society where old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth. For in your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society.¹⁵

At first, Johnson’s audience only heard “. . . upward to the great society”; it was not until he had repeated this phrase several times that his listeners would realize that “Great Society” was a title representing an entire program their president had orchestrated. In order to convey the

¹⁴ Barbara Hinckley, *The Symbolic Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 9-12.

significance of these two words, Johnson used them repeatedly in the short address (once in the next sentence, again in the following paragraph, and a total of seven more times later). For several paragraphs after the first reference to the Great Society, Johnson spoke of it in the abstract, almost describing it as an entirely new country:

The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time. But that's just the beginning. The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. . . . It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods. But most of all, the Great Society is not a safe harbor, a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor. So I want to talk to you today about three places where we begin to build the Great Society—in our cities, in our countryside, and in our classrooms.

Because he was giving a university graduation speech, he did not enter into any details (which would doubtless have detracted from the utopian quality with which he had presented it). Instead, he remained in the realm of ideals, clearly drawing inspiration from FDR's New Deal. Indeed, in stating that the Great Society was not a "safe harbor," Johnson perhaps had in mind a comment that Harry Hopkins, one of Roosevelt's speechwriters, made about the 1933 inaugural address (and has since been widely published in various secondary works): "With that one speech, and in those few minutes, the appalling anxiety and fears were lifted, and the people of the United States knew that they were going into a safe harbor under the leadership of a man who never knew the meaning of fear."¹⁶ Johnson admired FDR and drew inspiration for the Great Society largely from the New Deal,¹⁷ and he wished to craft a new program that would not only protect the poor and disadvantaged of the 1960s, but would also continue adapt to the people's needs long after his administration had ended. Thus, he did not wish simply to provide the "safe harbor" of the New Deal; he desired a program that would constantly challenge the nation to better itself.

¹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at the University of Michigan, May 22, 1964," *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965) 704. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 704-707.

¹⁶ Halford Ryan, "President Franklin D. Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address, 1933," *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents*, ed. Halford Ryan (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993) 93.

¹⁷ Larry Berman, "Lyndon B. Johnson: Paths Chosen and Opportunities Lost," *Leadership in the Modern Presidency*, ed. Fred Greenstein (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 136.

After presenting the Great Society, Johnson stepped back to describe the conditions against which his program would protect the people. Citing overpopulation and urban decay and quoting Aristotle, he reminded his listeners that “society will never be great until our cities are great. Today the frontier of imagination and innovation is inside those cities and not beyond their borders. New experiments are already going on. It will be the task of your generation to make the American city a place where future generations will come, not only to live but to live the good life.” Next, he turned to the environment: “We have always prided ourselves on being not only America the strong and America the free, but America the beautiful. Today that beauty is in danger. The water we drink, the food we eat, the very air that we breathe, are threatened with pollution.” Last, he addressed the dismal state of education, offering many statistics to prove how desperately reforms were needed. “Poverty must not be a bar to learning, and learning must offer an escape from poverty,” he proposed.

Johnson was forthright about the progress his administration had made toward remedying these problems. He explained that he did not have all the answers but that he would continue to strive toward a Great Society. No matter how much effort he put forth, however, “[t]he solution to these problems does not rest on a massive program in Washington, nor can it rely solely on the strained resources of local authority. They require us to create new concepts of cooperation, a creative federalism, between the National Capital and the leaders of local communities.” At the end of the address, LBJ demonstrated that he had retained certain elements of his first address to Congress after Kennedy’s death. Although he was more secure in the presidency, he still could not claim a legitimate mandate; he continued to ask the people for their help: “So, will you join in the battle to give every citizen the full equality which God enjoins and the law requires, whatever his belief, or race, or the color of his skin? Will you join in the battle to give every citizen an escape from the crushing weights of poverty? . . . Will you join in the battle to build the Great Society . . . ?” Beginning with a gathering of University of Michigan graduates in May of 1964, LBJ expanded his campaign to implore every American to help build the Great Society. This program to combat poverty, inequality, pollution, and other national problems, was effective when it was first presented, but its real success lay in Johnson’s subsequent efforts to make a real change in the nation.

Eight months later, Johnson delivered his inaugural address after finally establishing a popular mandate through his 1964 landslide victory over Barry Goldwater. This inaugural was remarkably similar to others before it, considering that this president seemed to have such a

novel (Barber would say *negative*) approach to leadership. The address was structured around what he described as the three articles of the American covenant: justice, liberty, and union. In the context of American history, Johnson explained how each of these notions was still valid in 1965—especially in light of the Great Society he was beginning to construct: “Under this covenant of justice, liberty, and union we have become a nation—prosperous, great, and mighty. And we have kept our freedom. But we have no promise from God that our greatness will endure. We have been allowed by him to seek greatness with the sweat of our hands and the strength of our spirit.”¹⁸

Without the pressure of a grieving nation to soothe—but with the memory of the 1961 inauguration with which to compete—Johnson felt the necessity of establishing his presidency as independent from Kennedy’s. As with the Great Society in general, Johnson was more effective when he was expressing his own, new ideas; his creativity came not through eloquent speech as much as energetic policy-making. The Cold War, which three presidents before him had been unable to solve, seemed stalemated, and while he would not retreat in that conflict, there was little he could do to win it. He knew that he could effect a real change in the lives of Americans, though, and so he focused most of his efforts on his new vision of the United States. In the inaugural he was forced to step back into general principles, and his language ultimately lacked both the eloquence of Kennedy’s inaugural and the power of his own policy addresses.

Because of his strength in policy areas, LBJ was generally more effective in delivering state of the union messages, and his 1967 Annual Message to Congress was no exception. This address was not simply a list of reforms he sought; when he could back it up with policy recommendations, Johnson’s ideological language was more subtle, more natural, and ultimately more pleasing as a historical text. One hesitates to call Johnson in 1967 effective; while he was still working toward his Great Society, Vietnam had been elevated to the position of primary national concern, and he had lost considerable popular support. Nevertheless, for those who paid attention to the state of the union, the address was well-constructed and a fine example of Johnson’s excellence in domestic policy.

¹⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “The President’s Inaugural Address, January 20, 1965,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966) 73.

Beginning with facts about the success of the Great Society (which he attributed not to himself but to the people's collective "determination to make this a better country"¹⁹), Johnson went on to remind the people, as did FDR in his second inaugural address, that the job had not yet been completed: "Now we must answer whether our gains shall be the foundations of further progress, or whether they shall be only monuments to what might have been—abandoned now by a people who lacked the will to see their great work through. I believe that our people do not want to quit—though the task is great, the work hard, often frustrating, and success is a matter not of days or months, but of years—and sometimes it may even be decades." Because of the uncertainty of the war in Vietnam, Johnson wanted to focus his address on the true state of the union, instead of more directly addressing the state of the world and the United States' involvement therein. Looking toward the future of the nation, Johnson proposed five elements of advancing the Great Society. The first of these elements, "programs," emphasized that it was not enough simply to continue the programs enacted in the earlier years of the Great Society; as he suggested in his address at the University of Michigan, the Great Society would challenge Americans to strive continuously to better the nation. Among these programs, Johnson endorsed "special methods and special funds to reach the hundreds of thousands of Americans that are now trapped in the ghettos of our big cities and, through Head Start, to try to reach out to our very young, little children," and he promised the Congress more specific recommendations soon.

Having coined the term "War on Poverty" in 1964, Johnson used military metaphors throughout the address: "This war—like the war in Vietnam—is not a simple one. There is no single battleline which you can plot each day on a chart. The enemy is not easy to perceive, or to isolate, or to destroy. There are mistakes and there are setbacks. But we are moving, and our direction is forward." Without specifically addressing Vietnam, Johnson allowed his audience to extend the metaphor back to the military conflict. In this way, he appealed to a phraseology that was already on the minds of the people, while also avoiding discussion of that issue.

As in any war, a unified front is a prerequisite for victory. Johnson's second ideal for the Great Society was partnership. The executive and legislative branches of the federal

¹⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union, January 10, 1967," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968) 2. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 2-14.

government had been cooperative in passing legislation toward the realization of the Great Society, but without the states' and localities' assistance in implementing the laws, progress would be greatly hindered. "each State, county, and city needs to examine its capacity for government in today's world, as we are examining ours in the executive department, and as I see you are in examining yours. Some will need to reorganize and reshape their methods of administration—as we [Congress and the executive] are doing. Others will need to revise their constitutions and their laws to bring them up to date—as we are doing. . . ." Johnson's appeal for help from the states echoed his more direct requests for assistance in previous addresses, as he attempted to bring the entire nation into the Great Society.

The third objective, priorities, reiterated the importance of certain programs, including Head Start, social security, clean air initiatives, and reducing crime. In this section of the address, Johnson delved deep into the particulars of the policies he supported, although he was clearly speaking to the entire nation (and not uniquely to the Congress) when he said, "I hope this Congress will try to help me do more for the consumer," or "I will propose these measures to the 90th Congress." Similarly, under the heading of "prosperity," LBJ reminded the people of the distance they had already come but also the distance that remained to be traveled. Again, he entered into the details of certain policy recommendations, concluding with more poetic reflections on prospects for the future of the grandchildren and great grandchildren of his generation.

The fifth element of the Great Society, "peace," required the entire second half of the speech to address fully. His listeners' minds were obviously on Vietnam, but Johnson chose to leave that area of the world for last. He first addressed general international concerns that the people could interpret as they chose: "Abroad, as at home, there is also risk in change. But abroad, as at home, there is a greater risk in standing still. . . . We are in the midst of a great transition—a transition from narrow nationalism to international partnership; from the harsh spirit of the cold war to the hopeful spirit of common humanity on a troubled and a threatened planet." He first addressed the advances made in Latin America, then Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Western Europe. Devoting significant attention to Soviet relations, he presented a list of agreements the United States was able to reach with the Soviet Union, proposing two more measures that would ease the Cold War. He concluded his discussion of the Cold War by stating that "[t]he time for rhetoric has clearly passed. The time for concerted

action is here and we must get on with the job,” but he did not outline precisely how this would happen.

The last part of Johnson’s exploration of the element of “peace” focused on the war in Vietnam, beginning with the following statements:

We are in Vietnam because the United States of America and our allies are committed by the SEATO Treaty to “act to meet the common danger” of aggression in Southeast Asia.

We are in Vietnam because an international agreement signed by the United States, North Vietnam, and others in 1962 is being systematically violated by the Communists. That violation threatens the independence of all the small nations in Southeast Asia, and threatens the peace of the entire region and perhaps the world.

We are there because the people of South Vietnam have as much right to remain non-Communist—if that is what they choose—as North Vietnam has to remain Communist.

As the American colonies ultimately chose their own fate in 1776, so would “the peoples of Asia . . . know that the door to independence [was] not going to be slammed shut.” Drawing on the American ideal of freedom of self-determination more than the ideal of absolute freedom, Johnson attempted to show that all nations would risk losing all freedoms if communism were not contained. “We will stand firm in Vietnam,” he asserted before admitting that he did not know how much longer the conflict would last. Johnson attempted to make a transition to general ideals and toward a conclusion by imploring the nation to count “not only our burdens but our blessings—for they are many.” He ended the address by simply promising the American people that the ultimate resolution would be a favorable one: “Let us draw encouragement from the signs of hope—for they, too, are many. Let us remember that we have been tested before and America has never been found wanting. So with your understanding, I would hope your confidence, and your support, we are going to persist—and we are going to succeed.”

This conclusion seemed only to address Vietnam. Johnson might have left his listeners on a more positive note if he had returned to the Great Society or to the first four ideals, which were infinitely more hopeful than his examination of peace (which ultimately addressed not peace but war). Nevertheless, the policy initiatives outlined earlier in the address were innovative and demonstrated Johnson’s vision of a truly great society.

Unfortunately, the war in Vietnam eclipsed Johnson’s domestic leadership, and his Great Society was unable to reach the heights he had envisioned. Both LBJ and his

predecessor entered into the presidency with a distinct leadership style, but in both cases their opportunities were curtailed by tragic circumstances beyond their control. During his time in office, Johnson was able to define some of the issues facing 1960s America and begin to resolve them, but he was ultimately unable to redefine the conflict in Vietnam in terms that the American people could embrace. Thus, LBJ, never known for his expertise before an audience, managed to use rhetorical means to his advantage on the domestic front—albeit in a different way from Kennedy or other previous presidents.

VI. RICHARD M. NIXON AND THE RISE OF THE MEDIA

By 1968, the “modern era” of American politics had evolved from its 1930s status into something that even FDR might not have recognized. Just as Roosevelt had ushered in the radio, Nixon was present for the birth of television, although the latter took longer to master the emergent medium of his age. In 1960, the televised Nixon-Kennedy debates, which marked the advent of television’s influence in political campaigns, doubtless contributed to Nixon’s loss in that year’s presidential elections. The future of politics did not look hopeful for a man who would never be called handsome or charismatic, but Nixon finally reached the presidency in 1968—and his fall from power in 1974 could be attributed to a “watchdog” press. Indeed, since the ‘60’s most forms of media (old and new) have continued to evolve into a largely sensationalistic enterprise, changing the face of all aspects of the political system and casting ever-increasing doubt on American leaders.

Throughout much of the United States’ early history, sensationalism was a journalistic norm. This tendency began to change, however, when Franklin D. Roosevelt’s popularity provided for generalized support of the government. Most of the journalists who did not personally agree with the goals of FDR’s presidency understood that continuing with their “tradition” of sensationalism in regard to this new president would not be in the best interest of the newspaper. As a result the “Rooseveltian rule of thumb for press coverage of politicians” was developed, “and it endured for forty years: The private life of a public figure should stay private and undisclosed unless it seriously impinged in his or her public performance.”¹ For instance, the sexual pursuits of John F. Kennedy, news of which would certainly top the front page of newspapers today, went unreported despite journalists’ knowledge of them.

Larry Sabato refers to the media of this era as “lapdogs,” sitting in the laps of presidents and, above all, behaving. By the time of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon, however, the behavior of the media was beginning to resemble more closely that of “watchdogs,” on the lookout for instances in which these presidents made harmful or unpopular policy decisions. This period, however, still largely guaranteed immunity from being publicly exposed for personal improprieties, although Nixon’s impeachment charges

¹ Larry J. Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism Has Transformed American Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1991) 30.

certainly contributed to the demise of “lapdog” journalism and the return to sensationalism (not until later did the media begin the practice of reporting every piece of reputation- and career-damaging news they could find, like the “junkyard dogs” Sabato claims they have become).²

By 1970, then, presidents needed to be more deliberate in selecting and researching policy issues before delivering an address to ensure against the media’s attacking an inconsistency, a fumbled line, or an unpopular idea. In addition to changes in the quality of media attention devoted to political issues, the amount of time given to politics has changed and shifted in and among the media. These opportunities for public address have become precarious situations for speechwriters, as even the coverage the speeches receive, and therefore their ability to influence those who were not present to hear the speech in its entirety, has diminished in recent decades. As a result, television has virtually taken control over the information to which the public is exposed. In 1968, Nixon’s presidential campaign was the first to be created with the expectation that his speaking engagements would appear on television. His campaign managers devised what they called the “HPS precept, by which presidential appearances were organized with a headline, photograph, and ‘sound bite’ in mind.”³ With greater attention to the role of television in presidential campaigns (and with increasingly shrewd campaign strategists), Nixon was finally able to propel himself into the White House. Once there, however, he would discover a media presence at least equal to that which he experienced as a candidate for the presidency.

Nixon began his 1969 inaugural address with the following words: “I ask you to share with me today the majesty of this moment. In the orderly transfer of power, we celebrate the unity that keeps us free.”⁴ Celebrating the United States in relation to other nations, Nixon was able to evoke the memory of more oppressive countries (such as Czechoslovakia, where, only months earlier, Soviet forces had overthrown the more moderate Czech government) without having to make a direct reference to communism. The opening sentence thus set a positive tone for the rest of the address, which expressed a sense of Nixon’s enthusiasm and

² Sabato 42-64.

³ David Reid, “Public Eloquence,” *The State of the Language*, eds. Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels (Berkeley: UP of California, 1990) 269.

⁴ Richard M. Nixon, “Inaugural Address, January 20, 1969,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971) 1. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 1-4.

vision for the nation: “Each moment in history is a fleeting time, precious and unique. But some stand out as moments of beginning, in which courses are set that shape decades or centuries. This can be such a moment.” Using the bicentennial anniversary of the United States and the beginning of the third millennium as landmarks in time, Nixon emphasized the need to focus on the future over the past or present. “The greatest honor history can bestow is the title of peacemaker,” Nixon explained. “This is our summons to greatness. I believe the American people are ready to answer this call.” After years of war in Vietnam, the people would surely embrace this suggestion of peace.

In 1968 the average sound bite lasted 42.3 seconds,⁵ which was generally long enough for a president to express a complete idea (and for the media to broadcast the entire relevant segment of the address). For example, in this time, the evening news could present Nixon saying not only the above three sentences, but all of the following:

The greatest honor history can bestow is the title of peacemaker. This honor now beckons America—the chance to help lead the world at last out of the valley of turmoil and onto that high ground of peace that man has dreamed of since the dawn of civilization. If we succeed, generations to come will say of us now living that we mastered our moment, that we helped make the world safe for mankind. This is our summons to greatness. I believe the American people are ready to answer this call.

At the time, this would have been a fairly standard passage to hear on television—but it is certainly more informative than the kind of soundbite Americans in the 1990s are used to hearing. While the likelihood that an entire speech would be aired was growing smaller and smaller in the 1970s, significant portions were still accessible to the public through television and radio (although inaugurals, like state of the union addresses, were generally broadcast live in their entirety—but reaired in smaller fragments). For the American people in 1968, being able to hear (and see) the president speak for a full minute was preferable to only hearing his voice on the radio or reading a text in the newspaper the next morning. Americans, many of whom had been alive during FDR’s presidency, would take comfort in Nixon’s reminder that “[s]tanding in this same place a third of a century ago, Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed a nation ravaged by depression and gripped in fear. He could say in surveying the Nation’s troubles: ‘They concern, thank God, only material things.’ Our crisis today is in reverse. We find ourselves rich in goods, but ragged in spirit. We are torn by division, wanting unity.”

Hearing Roosevelt's fireside chats had been a novelty in 1933, and by the 1960s, *watching* the president talk about the nation's great Depression and wartime leader was an opportunity not to be missed.

Nixon understood the connotations the word "rhetoric" had taken on (especially with regard to politics), and he believed that the rhetoric of the Cold War had taken its toll on American ears. He chose to address this issue directly, noting that "America has suffered from a fever of words; from inflated rhetoric that promises more than it can deliver; from angry rhetoric that fans discontents into hatreds; from bombastic rhetoric that postures instead of persuading." Additional rhetoric could only continue the domestic upheaval that plagued the nation, and, more globally, he knew that more rhetoric could only maintain the Cold War in its current state; in both cases true action was necessary if the United States sought a true resolution. Such a statement could have sounded like nothing more than additional rhetoric, but the action Nixon subsequently took toward ending the conflict in Vietnam and toward easing relations with China, as well as the *détente* with the Soviet Union, proved that he truly wished to end the Cold War. As was the case with Johnson's Great Society, a part of the mark of effective rhetoric clearly lies in its reliability: If a president says he will remedy a certain problem, his overall discourse gains credibility if he does indeed make strides toward solving the problem.

Using the standard Cold War argument that true freedom and equality must begin at home, Nixon turned to civil rights: "No man can be fully free while his neighbor is not. To go forward at all is to go forward together. This means black and white together, as one nation, not two. The laws have caught up with our conscience. What remains is to give life to what is in the law: to insure at last that as all are born equal in dignity before God, all are born equal in dignity before man." Implicitly praising supporters of real equality, Nixon suggested—knowing, of course, that this was not the case—that the consciences of all Americans favored civil rights legislation; executing these laws would be simple, he suggested, as long as the nation worked together toward what they all knew was right.

This address achieved many goals beyond those generally associated with inaugurals: "Nixon's presidential demeanor, his attempt to unite the country (he used 'we' sixty-six times in the speech), the abstract language that no one could disagree with, his quotations from and

⁵ Kiku Adatto, "The Incredible Shrinking Sound Bite," *The New Republic* (28 May 1990) 20.

allusions to Democratic presidents, his emphasis on peace, and his special recognition of groups that had not supported him in the election combined to offer even the most skeptical listener the image of a concerned president.”⁶ Although he generally retained the use of “we” over “I,” Nixon used “I” fourteen times in quick succession toward the end of the speech. In some cases, he was recounting his past experience in government; at other times, the “I” seemed self-glorifying: “I know that peace does not come through wishing for it—that there is no substitute for days and even years of patient and prolonged diplomacy.” The American citizens, too, knew that peace could not be wished upon a nation; Nixon’s highlighting his personal knowledge as a political leader served to separate him from the people; he was not merely a citizen addressing fellow citizens, but a wiser president, somewhat detached—and elevated—from the nation.

Before the end of the speech, Nixon wisely returned to the use of “we” to finish his first public address as president with images of compassion, brotherhood, “the American spirit,” “the chalice of opportunity,” “the will of God,” and “the promise of man.” Despite certain peculiarities of the address, its overarching theme of peace—real peace—told the people that this new leader would actively pursue the end of the war in Vietnam and would strive for other American ideals they believed had been neglected in recent years.

Two years after the inauguration, many of these goals remained to be achieved. Nixon suggested, much as he had in his inaugural address, that the difficult years of American history were coming to a close and that “[n]ow we must let our spirits soar again. Now we are ready for the lift of a driving dream. The people of this Nation are eager to get on with the quest for new greatness.”⁷ In his state of the union address, Nixon chose to focus on domestic issues, promising to deliver a report on international affairs at a later date. Six goals shaped the address: welfare reform, peacetime prosperity, environmental cleanup efforts, improved health care for all Americans, a renewed balance of federalism, and a reform of the national government. For each of these points, Nixon gave a summary of the history of the issue and then suggested ways to improve the situation, and this format lent structure and coherence to the state of the union, an address that can often incorporate dozens of elements and seem never

⁶ Hal W. Bochyn, “Richard Milhous Nixon,” *U.S. Presidents as Orators: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Halford Ryan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995) 255.

to end. Nixon's decision to limit his address to the six policy issues he deemed most important was a shrewd rhetorical strategy in that it sustained the audience's attention and allowed him to enter into greater detail on each issue.

Indeed, the issue to which Nixon devoted the most time in the address was the restructuring of the federal government's relationship with the states and localities. Because each of the six sections examined its focal issue so closely, the president was able to present the question of federalism from a historical and economic perspective. Although the balance of power among the levels of government was (and remains today) an undeniably partisan issue, Nixon was able to avoid presenting it as such by implying that the new times simply called for "a new and more creative balance to our approach to government." He explained himself as follows:

The idea that a bureaucratic elite in Washington knows best what is best for people everywhere and that you cannot trust local governments is really a contention that you cannot trust people to govern themselves. This notion is completely foreign to the American experience. Local government is the government closest to the *people*, it is most responsive to the individual *person*. It is people's government in a far more intimate way than the Government in Washington can ever be.

Members of Nixon's listening audience, regardless of their political affiliation, could not disagree with this statement, which essentially encapsulated the guiding principle of the American Revolution. The five other goals Nixon expressed in his 1971 state of the union address used similar strategies, rendering the address less partisan and more thought-provoking. Addressing the people when he said, "the 92nd Congress, your Congress, our Congress, at the end of its term, will be able to look back on a record more splendid than any in our history," Nixon shifted his language to speak directly to that Democratic Congress:

This can be the Congress that helped us end the longest war in the Nation's history, and end it in a way that will give us at last a genuine chance to enjoy what we have not had in this century: a full generation of peace.

This can be the Congress that helped achieve an expanding economy, with full employment and without inflation—and without the deadly stimulus of war.

This can be the Congress that reformed a welfare system that has robbed recipients of their dignity and robbed States and cities of their resources.

⁷ Richard M. Nixon, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 22, 1971," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972) 51. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 50-58.

This can be the Congress that pressed forward the rescue of our environment, and established for the next generation an enduring legacy of parks for the people.

This can be the Congress that launched a new era in American medicine, in which the quality of medical care was enhanced while the costs were made less burdensome.

But above all, what this Congress can be remembered for is opening the way to a new American revolution—a peaceful revolution in which power was turned back to the people—in which government at all levels was refreshed and renewed and made truly responsive.

Concluding with the goals that guided the address, Nixon asked members of Congress to strive to make the 92nd Congress “a great moment for America.” Because of the Democrat-led Congress, the notion of cooperation between the executive and legislative branches could not be assumed; Nixon ended his state of the union with the image of a joint, bipartisan effort to realize his six goals for the nation.

On January 20, 1973, Nixon delivered his second inaugural address, which opened with the prospect of peace. The president proclaimed, “As we meet here today, we stand on the threshold of a new era of peace in the world. The central question before us is: How shall we use that peace?”⁸ A peace agreement was indeed signed only one week after the inauguration, and Nixon had already given careful consideration to the kind of peace he sought: “The peace we seek in the world is not the flimsy peace which is merely an interlude between wars, but a peace which can endure for generations to come.”

After praising the past year’s peacemaking efforts, Nixon turned to the future, presenting the dilemma that had plagued the United States since the end of the Second World War and had led to American involvement in Vietnam in the 1960s. “It is important that we understand both the necessity and the limitations of America’s role in maintaining that peace,” he explained,

[u]nless we in America work to preserve the peace, there will be no peace.

Unless we in America work to preserve freedom, there will be no freedom.

But let us clearly understand the new nature of America’s role, as a result of the new policies we have adopted over these past four years.

We shall respect our treaty commitments.

We shall support vigorously the principle that no country has the right to impose its will or rule on another by force.

⁸ Richard Nixon, “Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 1973,” *The Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents*, ed. John Gabriel Hunt (New York: Gramercy, 1997) 452. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 451-57.

He explained that the United States' international priorities would remain the limitation of nuclear arms and the improvement of relations with the Soviet Union, but that other nations would be expected to do their part in protecting and promoting democracy in the world.

Nixon delineated the requirements for peace in the world, and after establishing this theme, he interwove domestic issues:

Just as building a structure of peace abroad has required turning away from old policies that failed, so building a new era of progress at home requires turning away from old policies that have failed.

Abroad, the shift from old policies to new has not been a retreat from our responsibilities, but a better way to peace.

And at home, the shift from old policies to new will not be a retreat from our responsibilities, but a better way to progress.

Abroad and at home, the time has come to turn away from the condescending policies of paternalism—of “Washington knows best.”

In this last line, Nixon repeated a notion from his 1971 state of the union message, emphasizing his belief that a strong, central government was not only an issue of partisan preference but, more fundamentally, of condescension versus trust.

In opposite ways, Nixon was saying in his second inaugural that the role of the national government needed to be reevaluated. On the one hand, the United States could not control the entire world all of the time, and other countries would have to assume some of the responsibility for ensuring their own futures. On the other hand, the national government needed to lessen its grip on the states so that each state could seek its own equilibrium. Nixon seemed essentially to perceive the national government (of which, ironically, he was one of the leaders) as the root of the international and domestic imbalance. Building on Kennedy's “Ask not” statement, Nixon said to the American people, “Let each of us ask—not just will government do for me but what can I do for myself. In the challenges we face together, let each of us ask—not just how can government help, but how can I help?” Because Kennedy's presidency was remembered for his celebrated phrase, Nixon was able to define the difference between himself and his deceased opponent (against whom he still competed for a place in the minds and hearts of Americans) by proposing a more modern take on JFK's philosophy.⁹

⁹ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 96.

In his second inaugural, Nixon emphasized the new conception of balance that the United States (and specifically the national government) needed to strive toward in order to maintain the peace while also promoting democracy in the world. After the American failure in Vietnam and Johnson's failure as a wartime president, Nixon knew that war with communist nations was simply not an option. Moreover, the wartime protests had taken their toll on domestic morale; in recovering from the war, the nation would have to realize that the 1960s rebellion was nothing more than a phase. "In recent years," he said, "that faith [in America] has been challenged. Our children have been taught to be ashamed of their country, ashamed of their parents, ashamed of America's record at home and of its role in the world." Instead of ignoring these aspects of the recent past (as would have been more typical of inaugurals), Nixon took the opportunity to discuss the problem, which set an example for parents to broach the issue with their children as well. He also suggested that the dissension of the era was a necessary evil of the good the United States had been able to accomplish as a result of their efforts: "America's record in this century has been unparalleled in this world's history for its responsibility, for its generosity, for its creativity, and for its progress. Let us be proud that our system has produced and provided more freedom and more abundance, more widely shared, than any other system in the history of the world"—*and let us no longer be ashamed*, he implied.

Ending the address, Nixon made reference to the bicentennial anniversary of the United States, which would take place in the next presidential election year. "Let us pledge together," he said, "to make these next four years the best four years in America's history, so that on its two-hundredth birthday America will be as young and vital as when it began and as bright a beacon of hope for all the world." As America would soon discover, Nixon's involvement in conspiring to cover up the Watergate break-ins would render "the next four years" among the most turbulent in American domestic affairs since the Civil War.

By the summer of 1974, Richard Nixon was facing almost certain impeachment, and the only way out seemed to be resignation. After all of Nixon's efforts to master the media, the "watchdog"-style investigative reporting of *Washington Post* reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward between 1972 and 1974 destroyed his administration and irreversibly altered the modern presidency. On August 8 Nixon delivered a resignation address in which he stated that, while he wished to finish the term to which the American people had elected him (or at least to let the Constitutional impeachment process take its course), he could no longer justify

remaining in the presidency because he had lost his political base in Congress. Never admitting guilt, but rather attributing his resignation to the fact that a trial would hinder the government's legislative progress, Nixon acknowledged that his resignation had presented "a dangerously destabilizing precedent for the future"¹⁰—not to mention its effect on the immediate future of American politics.

"But the interests of the nation must always come before any personal considerations," he explained. "From the discussions I have had with congressional and other leaders, I have concluded that because of the Watergate matter, I might not have the support of the Congress that I would consider necessary to back the very difficult decisions and carry out the duties of this office in the ways the interests of the nation would require." Nixon repeated several times that he had always put the interest of the country first and that, in resigning, he was continuing to do so. "I have never been a quitter," he said, evoking his "I am not a crook" line from earlier in his presidency. Indeed, he explained to a skeptical America, in leaving the White House he was not quitting as much as remaining true to his presidential oath to act in the best interest of the nation. "Therefore," he announced in an even voice, "I shall resign from the presidency effective at noon tomorrow. Vice President Ford will be sworn in as president at that hour in this office."

Although this statement came only one third of the way into the address, it conveyed the essence of the speech, and the other two thirds—a gloomy, meandering example of ceremonial address—disappeared into history. Gerald Ford completed Nixon's term in office, doing little of note except pardoning the former president to spare the nation the pain of watching its former president on trial. His primary accomplishment concerned the healing of the nation—although his primary action toward that end, pardoning Nixon, served only to remind the people of the excesses of the Republican party—and American Cold War efforts arguably suffered as a result. Thus, although Nixon's resignation was in the best interest of the United States, it could not remedy the problems he had caused when he instigated the Watergate cover-up, and the next two years of American presidential politics were devoted to recovering from Nixon's un-presidential actions.

Since Nixon's resignation, attack journalism and sensationalism have continued to increase, and even when newspapers and television networks cover positive events, sound

¹⁰ Richard M. Nixon, "Resignation Address, August 8, 1974," *Louisville Courier-Journal* August 9, 1974: A9.

bites are becoming less and less informative, as they have diminished in length from 42.3 seconds in 1968 to 9.8 seconds in 1988.¹¹ Because of its coincidence with Nixon's presidency, the precise effects of the evolution of the media (and particularly television) in the 1960s and 1970s cannot be evaluated except in conjunction with the issues Watergate brought to the forefront of American politics. These issues irreversibly changed Americans' relationship with their leaders, and as the role of the media increases, the political dynamics continue to shift, often making journalists seem as dangerous to democracy¹² as politicians like Nixon.

¹¹ Adatto 20-23.

¹² James Fallows, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

VII. RONALD REAGAN: THE ULTIMATE RHETORICAL PRESIDENT?

Two years after Nixon's resignation, the nation had not yet forgotten Watergate, and Ford lost the presidency to Jimmy Carter, who used Nixon's downfall to his advantage with the campaign promise that he would never lie to the people. While American citizens sought (and found) an honest president in 1976, honesty was not as important to the future of the free world as strong leadership. Carter ambitiously pursued many of his goals, but his unwillingness to prioritize eventually meant that his policy initiatives were not representative of a clear vision.¹ Thus, although Carter sought new domestic policies, his rhetorical strategy was not as actively anti-Soviet as others before and since. In foreign affairs, his Wilsonian views allowed for the negotiation of the SALT II treaty, among other accomplishments, but his rhetorical approach toward the Soviets was not vigorously anti-communist enough, focusing on themes of peace and human rights, to bring a final resolution to the Cold War.² Even with regard to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter's strategy was perceived as *reactive*, which proved inadequate internationally and in terms of re-election.

After Jimmy Carter's presidency, which had provided many unfulfilled opportunities for bold leadership, the American people were ready for a president full of enthusiasm for his position, and Ronald Reagan seemed to fit the job description perfectly. A former actor who wondered how someone who had never been in show business could succeed as president, Reagan reinvigorated the White House, becoming known as the "Great Communicator"—a distinction that represented the quantity of his addresses as well as the "greatness" of his appeals. One of the audiences to which he devoted the most attention was the Soviet Union. Throughout much of Carter's administration, the United States had attempted to ignore the Cold War in hopes that it would simply end, and Reagan entered into office rhetorically armed to bring a final resolution to the crisis that no American president over the course of three decades had been able to remedy.

By 1981, the global situation had not changed dramatically, yet Reagan was determined to return to the notion of a "cold war" as a rhetorical conflict that could be won or lost using verbal "attacks." Reagan also used popular appeals more generally toward

¹ Erwin C. Hargrove, "Jimmy Carter: The Politics of Public Goods," *Leadership in the Modern Presidency*, ed. Fred Greenstein (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 233.

achieving all of his presidential goals, but the one for which he is best known is the end of the Cold War. This issue, unlike many others faced by the president, required strategy more than absolute deeds; generally, a president announces the necessary action before taking it. In this way, the Cold War ushered in a new kind of presidential leadership: that of words *as* actions. This notion, explored by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson in *Deeds Done in Words*, has expanded over time so that nearly all forms of presidential address now not only describe events or issues, but they also have the ability to create them, to cause them, to *do* them. For instance, simply reciting the presidential oath on inauguration day causes someone to become the new president (as has been the case since the nation's founding); additionally, the assertion by several presidents in state of the union addresses that "I will request that Congress consider legislation toward . . ." is, in effect, the request.³ Other examples of this phenomenon abound in presidential speech, and the Cold War exemplifies it. More generally, the leadership of modern presidents relies increasingly on persuasion and popular appeals (as Richard Neustadt suggested in *Presidential Power*).

Because of his success before an audience, Reagan is often considered one of the pioneers of extensive rhetorical appeal from the White House; indeed, he may have come close to perfecting the art of rhetorical leadership in many ways, but he did not invent it. As Jeffrey Tulis observes in *The Rhetorical Presidency*, the presidency's use of rhetoric has evolved gradually from its nineteenth-century state, through Teddy Roosevelt's transitional period, to the "new way" of Wilson and later presidents (although the process of change continues throughout the "modern era").⁴ In 1986, a *Time* magazine article said of Reagan, "Only when it comes to his speeches is Reagan truly a hands-on President. His writers supply the substance; he adds the homespun parables. His attention to speeches reflects his own perceptions of the job: on many issues he sees himself less as an originator of policy than as the chief marketer of it."⁵ This "marketing" began with Reagan's first inaugural address.

The opening words of this address highlight the inauguration itself: "To a few of us here today this a solemn and most momentous occasion, and yet in the history of our nation it is a commonplace occurrence. The orderly transfer of authority as called for in the

² Hargrove 245-47.

³ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975) 6-7.

⁴ Jeffrey Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987).

⁵ "How Reagan Stays Out of Touch," *Time* (December 8, 1986): 34.

Constitution routinely takes place, as it has for almost two centuries, and few of us stop to think how unique we really are. In the eyes of many in the world, this every-four-year ceremony we accept as normal is nothing less than a miracle.”⁶ In reminding the people of the wonder of democratic elections and of the “orderly transfer of authority,” Reagan seemed to be promoting democracy in the same way as he had made commercials for General Electric.

In the next paragraphs, after paying tribute to his predecessor (which also served to reinforce his point about free elections), Reagan turned his attention toward a subject that is generally not discussed in inaugurals: the nation’s problems. The unusual tactic of discussing the societal ills he wished to address before even praising the nation’s momentous past may have startled some Americans, but to others, it demonstrated their new president’s desire to effect change. The first issue he mentioned, “economic affliction of great proportions,” was concluded with the statement, “let there be no misunderstanding: We are going to begin to act, beginning today.” The action he prescribed revolved around the notion that “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.” Contrasting self-rule with “elite” rule, Reagan reminded Americans that “government for, of, and by the people” was in their best interest—economically, politically, and in all other respects. By presenting a problem he could solve in the address, he got an early start promoting this new federalism toward which he would strive throughout his administration.

The next ill he addressed, interest groups, was not as harmful as people may have believed, he explained, because certain such groups were composed not of big businesses or “special” interests but of the kinds of “men and women who raise our food, patrol our streets, man our mines and factories, teach our children, keep our homes, and heal us when we’re sick They are, in short, ‘We the people,’ this breed called Americans.” In returning the nation to “we the people,” Reagan reminded the country that “[w]e are a nation that has a government—not the other way around.” Finally, after presenting vivid examples of why a large national government was harmful to the American system, he finally stated his point: “It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the Federal Government and those

⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Inaugural Address, January 20, 1981,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982) 1. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 1-4.

reserved to the States or to the people. All of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government.”

Continuing with his argument for smaller government, Reagan said, “Now, so there will be no misunderstanding, it’s not my intention to do away with government. It is rather to make it work—work with us, not over us; to stand by our side, not ride on our back. Government can and must provide opportunity, not smother it; foster productivity, not stifle it.” In one sentence, the president was able to suggest, without directly saying so, that the government under his predecessors had worked over the people, ridden on their backs, smothered opportunity, and stifled productivity. Moreover, while he never explicitly said he could, Reagan implied that he would “provide opportunity” and “foster productivity”; regardless of political views, no one would object to opportunity or productivity.

Reagan then posed the following question that was surely on the minds of many Americans: “Can we solve the problems confronting us?” To answer this question, he paraphrased Winston Churchill in saying, “I did not take the oath I’ve just taken with the intention of presiding over the dissolution of the world’s strongest economy.” He would thus take all necessary steps to ensure that his plan maintained that economy.

Finally, more than half of the way through the address, Reagan entered into traditional epideictic address, praising America and Americans and musing about the self-determination that characterized the nation. In order to secure “happiness and liberty for ourselves, our children, and our children’s children,” he reiterated, the economic vitality of the nation needed to be a focal point of his administration, and that vitality could only come through smaller government. Then, wishing to link economic stability with political stability and freedom, Reagan turned to a discussion of “those neighbors and allies who share our freedom.” However, he obviously did not wish to speak about neighbors and allies as much as he had used the reference to them as a lead-in to a discussion about “the enemies of freedom, those who are potential adversaries.” Stating that “they will be reminded that peace is the highest aspiration of the American people,” he introduced a segment of the address that clearly aimed to accomplish this task: “Our reluctance for conflict should not be misjudged as a failure of will. When action is required to preserve our national security, we will act. We will maintain sufficient strength to prevail if need be, knowing that if we do so we have the best chance of never having to use that strength.” Because the United States had many “potential adversaries” at that time, the wording was vague in order that leaders of such nations would

interpret his words as applying to them. “Above all,” he concluded, “we must realize that no arsenal or no weapon in the arsenals of the world is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women. It is a weapon our adversaries in today’s world do not have. It is a weapon that we as Americans do have. Let that be understood by those who practice terrorism and prey upon their neighbors.”

At the end of the address, Reagan mentioned many D.C. landmarks (the Washington Monument, the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, the Potomac River, and Arlington National Cemetery), which served to evoke his audience’s sense of patriotism. He told his audience of a World War I soldier (“hero”) named Martin Treptow, who was sent to France in 1917 and died with the following words on a piece of paper in his pocket: “America must win the war. Therefore I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone.” Reagan’s first inaugural address ended with the suggestion that the situation facing the United States would not require Martin Treptow’s ultimate sacrifice, but it would require lesser sacrifice and, above all, faith.

This speech had begun with discussion of relatively specific policy issues, progressing toward the conclusion, when he evoked guiding principles for the nation. Because inaugurals usually proceed from general principles to more particular issues (and rarely enter into the realm of policy at all), it seems that Reagan made the conscious decision to ignore the prescribed generic elements. He seemed intent on discussing the economy, which he surely understood would not capture the attention of his audience, so he began with this subject and ended in the realm of patriotism and pride in American history, leaving his audience with the most concrete images of the speech. Given Reagan’s interest in addressing economic policy, the decision to rewrite the rules to meet the demands of the occasion ensured that the first address of his presidency would be remembered for its determination and not for the detail into which Reagan entered while discussing fiscal policy and his vision of a new balance of federalism.

By the following June, Reagan had begun to realize his economic goals and was gaining momentum in the Cold War. In recent years, American involvement had largely been reactive, and the president understood that the Americans simply could not win a war in which they were not *actively* engaged. In order to resolve the conflict, he knew that he would have to push the issue back into the spotlight. Thus, speaking to the British Parliament, he chose to

address democracy, which inevitably led to a discussion of communism—the real subject of the speech. Updating the famous line from Winston Churchill’s “iron curtain” speech, which he delivered in Missouri in 1946, Reagan said, “From Stettin on the Baltic to Varna on the Black Sea, the regimes planted by totalitarianism have had more than thirty years to establish their legitimacy.”⁷ Reminding his global audience of the threat these totalitarian regimes posed, Reagan quickly adopted alarmist language, suggesting “our terrible dilemma,” “predictions of doomsday,” “antinuclear demonstrations,” “their barbarous assault,” and finishing with two questions: “Must civilization perish in a hail of fiery atoms? Must freedom wither in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil?” With these phrases, Reagan brought the Cold War back to life for the United States and its allies.

The president’s immediate audience was British; it was thus especially appropriate that he made reference to Churchill, who had overseen the beginning of the Cold War. Reagan quoted the former British Prime Minister as saying, “I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war. What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines. But what we have to consider here today while time remains is the permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all countries.” Again building on Churchill’s insight, Reagan added, “Well, this is precisely our mission today: to preserve freedom as well as peace.” The United States was at peace with the Soviet Union, and through war Americans may have been able to create an environment of freedom for those currently living under communism, but a new strategy would be necessary in order to attain both freedom and peace.

While this address updated the British and Americans (as well as others) about Soviet-American relations, its primary rhetorical value came through what it said to the Soviet Union. Citing statistics about the failing Soviet economy, Reagan was telling the Soviets as much as the British about the problems inherent in communism. Comparing “free and closed societies—West and East Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, Malaysia and Vietnam” and concluding that “it is the democratic countries that are prosperous and responsive to the needs of their people,” Reagan was suggesting that their system simply was not working and that all Soviet citizens would be better off if the nation abandoned communism. He reinforced this

⁷ Ronald Reagan, “Address to Members of the British Parliament, June 8, 1982,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983) 742. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 742-48.

point with a vivid visual image, reminiscent of Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" address in 1963: "And one of the simple but overwhelming facts of our time is this: of all the millions of refugees we've seen in the modern world, their flight is always away from, not toward the Communist world. Today on the NATO line, our military forces face east to prevent a possible invasion. On the other side of the line, the Soviet forces also face east to prevent their people from leaving." Because communism no longer appeared to benefit anyone, Reagan implored the Soviet Union to seek other options. Reagan understood that such a major change would take time, but he also knew that he could not begin encouraging the USSR early enough.

Toward the end of the address, Reagan proposed a program by which western allies would "foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities, which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means." Because Soviet satellites were "taught" how to be communist, Reagan believed that they should also have the opportunity to "learn" democracy; after considering both options, people could choose which path they wished to follow.

Returning to Winston Churchill at the end of the address, Reagan quoted him as having said during World War II, "What kind of a people do they think we are?" Reagan believed it was time for western nations to ask themselves, "What kind of people do *we* think we are? [emphasis added]." To this question, he hoped the unanimous response would be, "Free people, worthy of freedom and determined not only to remain so but to help others gain their freedom as well." This address reminded the world of what the issues were and what the options would be: peace without freedom, freedom at the high cost of war, or freedom for each nation to decide its own fate. By stepping out of the American context, Reagan was able to address a wider range of issues and to base his anti-communist rhetoric on that of Winston Churchill, likening himself to the great wartime leader.

In January 1985, Reagan began his second term, delivering an inaugural address that conspicuously focused, as had his first inaugural, on domestic issues. Recalling that initial address, he discussed the progress made in the past four years toward his goal of reducing the size of the federal government. Using rhetoric similar to that in FDR's second inaugural address (but toward the opposite goal), Reagan said, "We are creating a nation once again vibrant, robust, and alive. But there are many mountains yet to climb. We will not rest until

every American enjoys the fullness of freedom, dignity, and opportunity as our birthright.”⁸ Out of his examination of the United States’ future prospects came a reflection on American values more characteristic of inaugurals than he had exhibited in his first: “And if we meet this challenge, these will be years when Americans have restored their confidence and tradition of progress; when our values of faith, family, work, and neighborhood were restated for a modern age; when our economy was finally freed from government’s grip; when we made sincere efforts at meaningful arms reductions and . . . helped preserve peace in a troubled world . . .”

In this inaugural, as in his first, Reagan reminded his audience that the country was “poised for greatness.” Likening 1985 to the eve of the American Revolution, he said that the two-party system had served the nation “well over the years, but never better than in those times of great challenge when we came together not as Democrats or Republicans, but as Americans united in a common cause.” The common cause facing all Americans, he suggested, was the power imbalance of the national government over the states and the people, which his second administration would continue to combat through economic reforms. Reagan reasoned that giving the people more freedom in their daily lives would lead to greater opportunity, which would in turn lead to greater freedom to the people; in this way, the nation would only have to make minor changes in the way it was being run in order to reap enormous benefits.

Reagan described the federal government’s role in the everyday lives of Americans as concerning “matters of social compassion,” explaining the importance of reducing dependency on the government in order that the people can realize their own potential. Toward realizing the nation’s potential, he remarked that the government had made great progress toward civil rights for all Americans and that this progress needed to continue “toward the brotherhood of man that God intended for us.” Building on the line of reasoning employed by numerous previous presidents, Reagan then implored the people to “remember that though our heritage is one of blood lines from every corner of the Earth, we are all Americans, pledged to carry on this last, best hope of man on Earth.” Unlike other presidents who used the United States’ world leadership as a reason for which Americans must strive toward equality and freedom at home as well as abroad, Reagan argued that because the United States simply *does* embrace

⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Second Inaugural Address, January 21, 1985,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988) 55. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 55-58.

these ideals, it is morally obligated to aid in promoting them around the world. In dealing with the Soviet Union, Americans needed to remember that the fundamental issue dividing these two countries was a difference in ideology; the Soviets needed to be either persuaded that democracy was the better regime or defeated in ways appropriate to a cold war. These means included the limitation of nuclear arms and eventually “the total elimination one day of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth.”

Because Reagan wished to bring the Cold War back to the forefront in order, he hoped, to end it forever, he used some of the same kinds of alarmist rhetoric Harry Truman had first employed in the Truman Doctrine. In this inaugural, Reagan stated that the Soviet Union “has conducted the greatest military buildup in the history of man, building arsenals of awesome offensive weapons” and suggested that American arsenals were far inferior. In outlining the history of the Cold War for the people, Reagan said, “Now, for decades, we and the Soviets have lived under the threat of mutual assured destruction—if either resorted to the use of nuclear weapons, the other could retaliate and destroy the one who had started it. Is there either logic or morality in believing that if one side threatens to kill tens of millions of our people our only recourse is to threaten killing tens of millions of theirs?” As long as both nations had such capabilities, this would continue to be the course of events in the conflict. Thus, he said, until arms limitations agreements had been negotiated, the United States needed to invest in new technology to prevent possible attacks so that war would not have to escalate into total destruction. Introducing the Strategic Defense Initiative (“Star Wars”) that he would officially propose shortly, Reagan clearly stepped into the realm of policy in this address, but he concluded it, as he had concluded his first inaugural, on a patriotic note:

History is a ribbon, always unfurling. History is a journey. And as we continue our journey, we think of those who traveled before us. . . . Now we’re standing inside this symbol of our democracy, and we see and hear again the echoes of our past: a general falls to his knees in the hard snow of Valley Forge; a lonely President paces the darkened halls and ponders his struggle to preserve the Union; the men of the Alamo call out encouragement to each other; a settler pushes west and sings a song, and the song echoes out forever and fills the unknowing air.

It is the American sound. It is hopeful, big-hearted, idealistic, daring, decent, and fair. That’s our heritage, that’s our song. We sing it still. For all our problems, our differences, we are together as of old. We raise our voices to the God who is the Author of this most tender music. And may He continue to hold us close as we fill the world with our sound—in unity, affection, and love—one people under God, dedicated to the dream of freedom that He has

placed in the human heart, called upon now to pass that dream on to a waiting and hopeful world.

God bless you, and God bless America.

This inaugural address resembled Reagan's first in terms of the order of its components; in neither inaugural did he feel constrained by the traditional ordering of the parts. Moreover, in both he entered into more policy detail than is typical of the genre, but by addressing these issues toward the beginning of the address, he ensured that he could jumpstart his presidency and still end the speech with the images of America his audience expected on inauguration day.

On January 28, 1986, Reagan, planning to deliver the state of the union, instead stepped forth to address his nation in the wake of the *Challenger* space shuttle tragedy. This speech—which was obviously composed on very short notice—incorporated two historical events between which the address was structured. Beginning with the assertion that “[n]ineteen years ago, almost to the day, we lost three astronauts in a terrible accident on the ground,”⁹ the speech portrayed Reagan not as a leader who could remedy any problem—he was very candid about the fact that he could not—but instead as a leader who seemed able to harness the sorrow of the entire nation and, on behalf of all citizens, eulogize the “seven heroes.”

Directly addressing the families of the astronauts, Reagan recognized that their pain was the most profound—and justly so, for their “loved ones were daring and brave, and they had that special grace, that special spirit that says, ‘Give me a challenge and I’ll meet it with joy.’ They had a hunger to explore the universe and discover its truths.” While praising the astronauts, Reagan also took the opportunity to glorify the United States, but always returning to the heroes of the day: “We’ve grown used to wonders in this century. It’s hard to dazzle us. But for 25 years the United States space program has been doing just that. We’ve grown used to the idea of space, and perhaps we forget that we’ve only just begun. We’re still pioneers. They, the members of the *Challenger* crew, were pioneers.”

Having addressed the nation at large and the astronauts’ families, Reagan identified one more group who would benefit from a few words from their beloved president: “the

⁹ Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation on the Explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger, January 28, 1986,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988) 94. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 94-95.

schoolchildren who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle's takeoff." To them, he said, "I know it is hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave." Speaking as much to the adults in his audience as to the children (although, because of Christa McAuliffe, countless classrooms across the nation were watching the takeoff), he served in this instant as a father figure for the nation,¹⁰ telling his children that accidents are a part of growing up, as is learning to accept them.

Reagan had begun his address by citing a historical incident, and he would finish with a more poetic, stirring event:

There's a coincidence here today. On this day 390 years ago, the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama. In his lifetime the great frontiers were the oceans, and a historian later said, "He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it." Well, today we can say of the *Challenger* crew: Their dedication was, like Drake's, complete.

The crew of the space shuttle *Challenger* honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God."

Throughout the address, Reagan never made any direct reference to the astronauts' death; at the end, he used the historian's quotation about Drake to suggest that the astronauts lived by the sky, died in it, and were buried in it. Throughout the speech, Reagan's focus was their *lives*, which he said served as a testament to the objectives pursued by the United States. While this address demonstrated a level of eloquence typical of Reagan or Kennedy, the subject matter meant that almost any president would have been successful with it; whenever a president can slip into one of his prescribed symbolic roles—especially in the wake of a tragedy or crisis—his rhetorical task is clearly delineated and his end easily attainable.

While national tragedies create a clear opportunity for presidential greatness in one variety of ceremonial address, in another—the state of the union—presidents rarely achieve greatness because of the undefined quality of these speeches. The longest public address a president gives, the state of the union has become an opportunity to recap the past year and to make tentative plans for the year to come; because Americans no longer have the attention

¹⁰ Barbara Hinckley, *The Symbolic Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves* (New York: Routledge,

span for such a long address on a few subjects, presidents have adopted the strategy of presenting many small items without developed arguments in support of them. While classic Reagan speechcraft shines through in the 1987 state of the union, this speech resembles those of other presidents in its tendency to spotlight many small issues instead of focusing on one or a few urgent matters to explore further. As Kathleen Hall Jamieson has said, if a president cannot “anchor an attitude” through logical, persuasive development of an idea, even the most effective emotional appeal to the people will not make a lasting impression.¹¹

Beginning with the economy, as he had in his inaugurals as well as many other addresses to the nation and to Congress, Reagan announced that the nation had finally achieved the low inflation and unemployment rates toward which he had striven since taking office, and although the progress should continue, the economy was no longer his most pressing concern. After praising his country for its economic soundness, Reagan shifted his attention onto an international issue whose resolution had not been so smooth: “But though we’ve made much progress, I have one major regret: I took a risk with regard to our action in Iran. It did not work, and for that I assume full responsibility. The goals were worthy. I do not believe it was wrong to try to establish contacts with a country of strategic importance or to try to save lives. . . . Let it never be said of this generation of Americans that we became so obsessed with failure that we refused to take risks that could further the cause of peace and freedom in the world.”¹² In using the Iran-Contra scandal as a means of introducing foreign affairs, Reagan captured his audience’s attention and added an additional issue to lengthen the speech without having to enter into too much detail about any single topic. Looking at the text of this address, one notices that each “chunk” (of either one or two related paragraphs) is of approximately the same length, which represents what Reagan determined to be the American attention span.

With regard to defense, Reagan began with the assertion that “[s]ince 1970 the Soviets have invested \$500 billion more on their military forces than we have.” Whether this figure was accurate, it surely engaged citizens—especially when he added that the American defense

1990).

¹¹ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “The State of Contemporary Political Discourse,” Symposium on Political Rhetoric in Contemporary America: The Cultural Implications of Public Discourse, Hampden-Sydney College, March 31, 1999.

budget had been cut dramatically in recent years. After a brief description of certain other areas of the world in which freedom was battling oppression, Reagan returned to the United States, celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Constitution. Then he focused his attention on another communist nation that needed to be carefully watched. After Nicaragua, Reagan discussed the SDI, then international trade, and finally came home to a discussion of the federal budget. With only short snippets of information on each of these issues, surely the Congress was not feeling very edified about the state of the union; Reagan did not even pretend that this address was directed at the legislature. He was merely in their house to address the nation. Toward the end of the address, Reagan announced that he would send Congress “a complete series of these special messages—on budget reform, welfare reform, competitiveness, including education, trade, worker training and assistance, agriculture, and other subjects.” Like other presidents before him, Reagan admitted that the state of the union address was no longer truly the time to “give to Congress information on the state of the union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient,” as the Constitution requires. Indeed, modern presidents constantly make such recommendations to Congress, which already knows all about the state of the union. This address—at least under Reagan—seems to have ceased to be a deliberative enterprise and became merely ceremonial, and its main appeal has become patriotism.

The end of the address manifested this notion, as Reagan talked about the constitutions of oppressive nations, which theoretically guarantee freedom of speech and other rights: “Well, if this is true, why is the Constitution of the United States so exceptional? Well, the difference is so small that it almost escapes you, but it’s so great it tells you the whole story in just three words: We the people. In those other constitutions, the Government tells the people of those countries what they’re allowed to do. In our Constitution, we the people tell the Government what it can do, and it can do only those things listed in that document and no others.” Five more paragraphs beginning with “we the people” supported the notion that the United States was unique in its commitment to liberty; the last concluded the address with the anecdote about the rising sun on George Washington’s chair at the Constitutional Convention.

¹² Ronald Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 27, 1987,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989) 56-57. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 56-61.

Reagan's concluding words were thus "Well, you can bet it's rising because, my fellow citizens, America isn't finished. Her best days have just begun."

This state of the union address consisted of approximately two-thirds patriotism and one-third policy recommendation—which even Reagan admitted would be followed by the “real” messages to Congress delineating his proposals. As the longest presidential address of the year, this speech simply must attempt to educate citizens about (or at least engage them in) the political process. Otherwise, each passage of the speech begins to seem like a 30-second commercial for some aspect of the United States, and while commercials are often entertaining, and are sometimes even persuasive, their message simply does not last.

Reagan's rhetorical leadership was effective to the extent that leadership is inherently rhetorical; his speaking abilities were *persuasive* in the short term but rarely “anchored” popular opinion in lasting arguments. He was considered the “Great Communicator” because of his ease in speaking and his use of anecdotes, poetic language, and humor, but also because he often had a clear vision and focused on those issues which he believed were of primary importance—and then he acted on those issues. However, as with other presidents, when there was no single issue that towered above the rest, as in the 1987 state of the union address, Reagan's “rhetorical leadership” was merely rhetoric (that is, well-crafted speech with a specific objective in mind), without being true leadership at all. Moreover, because presidents since Reagan have been expected to live up to his rhetorical standards, his “greatness” may even have led to further discontent among the people, who have not yet found another president possessing such speaking abilities.

VIII. GEORGE BUSH: BEYOND THE COLD WAR, BUT *BEYOND THE RHETORICAL PRESIDENCY?*

After Reagan's truly "rhetorical" presidency, George Bush reversed this trend—either understanding that he would never match the Great Communicator's abilities or simply preferring another strategy—and thus delivered far fewer major speeches in his first year in office than Reagan had.¹ Yet no matter how much Bush may have intended to steer his own course, he would constantly be compared to the precedent set by Reagan—and he would constantly fail to live up to it. When the Berlin Wall fell in December 1989, Bush was afforded the opportunity to look presidential, but this situation was not of his own making. The end of the Cold War marked the culmination of decades of other presidents' rhetoric, from the Truman Doctrine to Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" to Reagan's "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall!" Nevertheless, Bush could bask in the glory of a unified Germany and a free Berlin.

Even more helpful to Bush's presidential reputation was the Persian Gulf War, when his approval ratings increased to unprecedented levels. Even then, however, Bush's rhetoric itself was not lauded as a great success; his leadership strength lay in perceptions of his handling of Saddam Hussein. Yet while addressing the public about the conflict, Bush was seen as a great wartime leader. Unfortunately for his career as a rhetorical president, the war ended quickly, and after a honeymoon period that did not last long enough for reelection, Bush returned to his status as "not as great as Reagan." His apparent indifference to a mild recession in 1992, as well as the third-party candidacy of Ross Perot in the presidential election that year, meant that Bush would not be afforded a second chance at greatness in 1993.

Delivering his inaugural address in January 1989, Bush was, of course, unaware of the major events that would transpire during his administration, and his address was not unlike many other inaugurals of the twentieth century (indeed, at the beginning of 1989, Bush was using the same speechwriting staff as Reagan). He employed eloquent language and stirring

phrases and attempted to create a mood of progress: "I come before you and assume the Presidency at a moment rich with promise. We live in a peaceful, prosperous time, but we can make it better. For a new breeze is blowing, and a world refreshed by freedom seems reborn. For in man's heart, if not in fact, the day of the dictator is over. The totalitarian era is passing, its old ideas blown away like leaves from an ancient, lifeless tree. A new breeze is blowing, and a nation refreshed by freedom stands ready to push on."² Exploring traditional American principles, Bush also discussed "moral and intellectual satisfactions," liberty, free speech, justice, generosity, and other ideals.

A part of Bush's presidential campaign platform was that he represented a "kinder, gentler" form of Republicanism, which he evoked when he made reference to America's "high moral purpose" to "make kinder the face of the Nation and gentler the face of the world." Toward this goal, he suggested that the people reexamine such issues as poverty, welfare, and volunteerism. Also a remnant of his campaign, the phrase "a Thousand Points of Light" made an appearance in the inaugural as Bush challenged every citizen to become one of these "points of light" through volunteerism. These references demonstrate the emergent practice of extending the campaign into the administration—which can be dangerous because the purely rhetorical nature of campaigns could spread, not unlike a virus, to the heart of the political process. In fact, one of the most memorable parts of Bush's presidency remains the Thousand Points of Light. However, to Bush's credit, he included in the address an appeal to Democrats to strive toward bipartisanship in passing legislation. Although this goal could never be fully achieved—for if the Democrats and Republicans could agree on most issues, they would not be divided into two parties—the rhetorical effort was symbolic of a desire to look past political designations in dealing with all members of Congress.

Representative of this desire was a clearly bipartisan issue: drugs. This was the issue about which Bush entered into the greatest detail in his first public address as president, which suggests that Bush did hope to effect real change in those issues about which he believed a consensus existed. After mentioning this single issue, however, Bush began to conclude the address:

¹ Jeffrey Tulis, "Revising the Rhetorical Presidency," *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M UP, 1996) 6.

And so, there is much to do. And tomorrow the work begins. And I do not mistrust the future. I do not fear what is ahead. For our problems are large, but our heart is larger. Our challenges are great, but our will is greater. . . .

Some see leadership as high drama and the sound of trumpets calling, and sometimes it is that. But I see history as a book with many pages, and each day we fill a page with acts of hopefulness and meaning. The new breeze blows, a page turns, the story unfolds. And so, today a chapter begins, a small and stately story of unity, diversity, and generosity—shared, and written, together.

Between the new breeze blowing and the literary metaphor, this text resembles a Reagan address without the vision—which is essentially what it was. While Bush would be forced to discuss substantive policy issues soon enough, this speech heralded a presidency that would benefit from external forces more than it would ever be able to create internal ones.

Within one year of Bush's taking office, the Berlin Wall and communism finally gave way to a unified Germany and efforts at democracy in Eastern Europe. Because of the significance of the event, Bush introduced it as follows in his state of the union address (delivered one month after the Wall fell):

There are singular moments in history: dates that divide all that goes before from all that comes after. Many of us in this chamber have lived much of our lives in a world whose fundamental features were defined in 1945. The events of that year decreed the shape of nations. The pace of progress. Freedom or oppression for millions of people around the world.

The year 1945 provided the common frame of references—the compass points of the post-war era we've relied upon to understand ourselves. That was our world. Until now. The events of the year just ended—the revolution of '89—have been a chain reaction—change so striking that it marks the beginning of a new era in the world's affairs.³

Because this dramatic change had taken place within Bush's first year in the White House, he structured his comments about the end of communism around a framework of comparing "a year ago" to the evening on which he was delivering the address to Congress. For example, "[a] year ago, freedom's playwright, Vaclav Havel, languished as a prisoner in Prague. Today, it's Vaclav Havel—President of Czechoslovakia." And "a year ago, Erich Honecker of East

² George Bush, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1989," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990) 1. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 1-4.

³ George Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, January 30, 1990," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991) 129. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 129-134.

Germany claimed history as his guide. He predicted the Berlin Wall would last another hundred years. Today—less than one year later—it’s the Wall that’s history.”

Despite the importance of the events of December 1989, this state of the union, which Bush promised would not “detail every new initiative . . . for the coming year, nor . . . describe every line item in the budget,” gave a few minutes of attention to the destruction of the Wall before detailing *nearly* every new initiative he could think of: the Family Savings Plan, capital gains tax cuts, the War on Drugs, space exploration, education, Head Start, the Environment Protection Agency, a plan to plant a billion trees per year, Social Security, and countless other issues. When he had exhausted his list, Bush returned to vague, Cold War-esque rhetoric: “Six months ago, early in this season of change, I stood at the gates of the Gdansk Shipyard in Poland at the monument to the fallen workers of Solidarity. It’s a monument of simple majesty. Three tall crosses rise up from the stones. Atop each cross, an anchor—an ancient symbol of hope. The anchor in our world today is freedom. Holding us steady in times of change—a symbol of hope to all the world. And freedom is at the very heart of the idea that is America.” Because the end of the Cold War was not guaranteed to follow Germany’s reunification, Bush knew that the country could not yet let its guard down: “We are in a period of great transition, great hope, yet great uncertainty. We recognize that the Soviet military threat in Europe is diminishing, but we see little change in Soviet strategic modernization. Therefore, we must sustain our own strategic offense modernization and the Strategic Defense Initiative.” Citizens, no more confident than Bush that the Cold War was coming to a close, did not have to be reminded that freedom was an American ideal not shared by much of the world. Dramatic global transformation had begun when the Wall fell, but the change was much more profound than to require merely reasserting a commitment to democracy. Although helping the Soviet Union to determine where it would fit into the new order might have a place in the state of the union address, Bush did not take the opportunity to address this issue. The concerns he did address—reduction of American troops in Europe, for instance—were not investigated thoroughly enough to suggest any definitive impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall on the state of America in 1990, and while the address may be considered the best state of the union of his presidency, its lack of focus ultimately meant that it contained little more than a laundry list embellished with poetic flourishes.

Later that year, the United States came to the rescue of the tiny nation of Kuwait, which had been invaded by Iraqi forces. After the failure of many diplomatic efforts and ultimatums,

American troops were sent in to restore order to the Middle East. No other president has ever attained such astronomical ratings. As with the Soviet Union in the Truman Doctrine, the Bush administration portrayed Saddam Hussein as an evil force who sought total world domination and simply needed to be stopped. Throughout the conflict, popular support was high, and after American forces ousted the Iraqis on February 27, 1991, only four days after the ground attack began, the Gallup Poll registered over 90 percent job approval. In the eyes of the American people, Bush's commander-in-chief role fit him well, and they relished the opportunity to witness him acting presidential throughout Operation Desert Storm.

The day the conflict ended, Bush addressed his nation, beginning with the straight facts: "Kuwait is liberated. Iraq's army is defeated. Our military objectives are met."⁴ As the speech progressed, Bush backed up and told the story from the beginning: "Seven months ago, America and the world drew a line in the sand. We declared that the aggression against Kuwait would not stand. And tonight, America and the world have kept their word." Because he understood the people's intense patriotism coloring every aspect of their perceptions of the conflict, the president then said, "[t]his is not a time of euphoria, certainly not a time to gloat. But it is a time of pride: pride in our troops; pride in the friends who stood with us in the crisis; pride in our nation and the people whose strength and resolve made victory quick, decisive, and just." Americans were indeed proud.

Interspersing principles with facts, Bush then provided more details: "I am pleased to announce that at midnight tonight eastern standard time, exactly 100 hours since ground operations commenced and 6 weeks since the start of Desert Storm, all United States and coalition forces will suspend offensive combat operations. It is up to Iraq whether this suspension on the part of the coalition becomes a permanent cease-fire." In this last sentence, Bush ensured that his listening audience understood that if fighting were to resume, it would be because of Iraqi aggression. Bush continued, explaining the terms of the cease-fire. Because of Americans' interest in the conflict, they surely understood and appreciated the detail in which Bush spoke.

Because Iraqi leaders (though probably not average citizens) were surely watching this address, Bush took a few moments to address the people of that nation. "At every

⁴ George Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Suspension of Allied Offensive Combat Operations in the Persian Gulf, February 27, 1991," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992) 187. All subsequent references to this address are from same source, pages 187-88.

opportunity,” he began, “I have said to the people of Iraq that our quarrel was not with them but instead with their leadership and, above all, with Saddam Hussein. This remains the case. You, the people of Iraq, are not our enemy. We do not seek your destruction. We have treated your POW’s with kindness. Coalition forces fought this war only as a last resort and look forward to the day when Iraq is led by people prepared to live in peace with their neighbors.” In addition to reminding the Iraqi leadership that the war had been of their own making, this statement portrayed Bush as the “kinder, gentler” president he had promised to be.

In conclusion, Bush said, “This war is now behind us. Ahead of us is the difficult task of securing a potentially historic peace. Tonight though, let us be proud of what we have accomplished. Let us give thanks to those who risked their lives. Let us never forget those who gave their lives. May God bless our valiant military forces and their families, and let us all remember them in our prayers.” At this time, the president was seeking “a potentially historic peace” with both Iraq and the Soviet Union, as the Cold War had been growing more and more remote, and, by February 1991, the USSR’s dissolution was only months away.

Bush’s four years in the White House were among the most exciting in recent history, but the president himself had little to do with that excitement. Like Carter, Bush was more *reactive* than active, but circumstances placed the latter in a position to reap certain benefits of Reagan’s active leadership. The success of Operation Desert Storm, which has been described as a “textbook war,” was due at least in part to Bush’s leadership, which suggests that he may have excelled if his entire administration had been devoted to crisis leadership. On a rhetorical level, his best leadership surrounded the situation in the Persian Gulf, and his inclination to give fewer addresses than his predecessor suggests that Bush sensed the necessity of limiting his rhetoric to occasions that absolutely required it. Thus, for a man who has “been accused of having English as a second language,”⁵ George Bush perhaps had a keen understanding of the limits of the rhetorical presidency after all.

⁵ George Bush, address, Conference on “The Presidency and Rhetorical Leadership,” George Bush Presidential Conference Center, College Station, TX, 5 March 1999.

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS FOR A RHETORICAL FUTURE

Since the end of the Cold War, nothing of its scope has emerged to replace the immediate sense of crisis that existed for so long in the United States and abroad. Indeed, today's general atmosphere of political complacency is unparalleled since the Coolidge administration. Because of this lack of crises, presidents no longer have a constant source of inspiration from which to draw in public addresses. The rhetorical greatness of presidents such as FDR and Kennedy came largely from the mere *presence* of issues about which to speak; today, that presence is no longer guaranteed. In devising a rhetorical strategy in the post-Cold War era, a president must not only consider the nation's historical record on various issues, but he must also reflect on the differences between the problems facing his predecessors and those facing his own administration. Certain changes over the last several decades have had a positive impact on the United States; others have made the chief executive role more problematic. Thus, although presidents often resort to patriotic appeals to the past, they must not attempt to reinstate political customs—rhetorical or otherwise—that once served the nation, for that nation was a far different one from that in which we live today.

Indeed, the nation has undergone significant changes since FDR's first inauguration. During the Great Depression, the challenge to political leaders was simply to ease the suffering—on both economic and psychological levels. The ultimate end to the Depression came with the beginning of World War II, when attention shifted to this new international crisis. These two events were followed almost immediately by the Cold War, which meant that from 1930 until 1990, the United States was in a constant state of crisis. Presidential leadership necessarily evolved to keep up with the changing demands of an increasing world power, and rhetorical leadership, too, developed in ways particular to an era of widespread poverty and desperation, of major intercontinental war, and of precarious relations with a communist superpower—in short, crisis rhetoric emerged as the primary means of addressing the nation.

Presidents have attempted in various ways to adapt their popular leadership to the evolving world around them. Roosevelt quickly mastered the radio through his fireside chats and thus irreversibly altered American presidential politics. Kennedy used televised presidential debates to his advantage, and while Nixon's incorporation of television into his campaign strategy was not as rapid, he, too, eventually adapted to the new format in which he

was to present himself. Six decades after FDR and more than twenty years after Nixon, presidents use strategists, pollsters, and other specialists to create and maintain the precise image they desire throughout elections and administrations, and all public appearances must be carefully planned in order to accommodate the news coverage they are sure to receive. Speechwriters today are often charged with drafting something that more closely resembles a dramatic monologue than a persuasive or informational text. In the absence of saying anything meaningful and risking misrepresentation of a speech by the news media, speechwriters are inclined to parcel the clauses into tidy five- to ten-second blurbs about patriotism, pride, and other issues to which very few voters could possibly object. While radio and television originally brought leaders closer to the people, more recent factors—such as the rise of a new kind of media and the advent of the Internet—have served to distance the people from the political process.

No longer do American presidents construct their public addresses around formal logical arguments as FDR did after the bombing of Pearl Harbor or Eisenhower did in Little Rock in 1957. Today, the people are so cynical about the government in general that they would dismiss, for instance, a president's attempt to explicate the Founders' argument for a slow, deliberative political process in order to prevent hasty action from destroying the union. For instance, a president who attempted to argue rationally that the reason welfare reform was taking so long was that James Madison had prescribed a complex political system in *Federalist* No. 10 would be accused of pandering to the citizens. Indeed, the nation has grown so removed from the spirit of democratic leadership as expressed in its guiding documents that presidents may never be able to return to them for inspiration in public address. All that remains widely accepted is patriotic language and, when circumstances permit, the rhetoric of crisis. The United States' recent history of economic depression, war, and grave international tension has provided the context for greater contact between a president and his citizens, which has led Americans to expect that their president will address them frequently and provide valuable insight into the functioning of the government. Thus, the American people have, paradoxically, come to expect that the president *should* be an immediate presence in their lives, but they also believe that he, as a part of the Washington establishment they have come to distrust, will fail to meet their expectations. Unless there exists an important issue about which the president needs to speak to the people, his discourse will lack the import and

urgency to which his audience grew accustomed during the era of the Soviet threat, of court-ordered desegregation, or of widespread poverty and desperation.

The easiest time for a president to act presidential is when a grave problem commands his attention. It is easiest for a president to *sound* presidential when he speaks about that situation. These two statements, taken together, suggest that a president would be wise to create (or prolong) crises in order to maximize his image as a problem-solver before the people. But would the American public really “buy” such a plan (à la *Wag the Dog*)?

The people “bought” the Truman Doctrine. They “bought” Johnson’s War on Poverty. They even “bought” Reagan’s portrayal of the Soviet Union as an “Evil Empire.” Ironically, when the USSR collapsed only years later, the world saw that the former empire barely had the means to sustain its people. True, in these cases presidents did not concoct entirely new crises as much as they transformed existing issues into urgent problems, but the principle remains the same. As is the case with the news media, sensationalism seems to sell even when it is the U.S. president producing it, and the media’s influence on American politics is especially apparent in presidential rhetoric.

While crisis rhetoric urges decisive action, the other kind of presidential rhetoric, especially common on ceremonial occasions, seeks to avoid discussion of issues altogether. Hence, the American voter turns on the evening news just hours after a new president has taken the oath of office and hears eloquent restatements of what he probably already knows: “Today a generation raised in the shadows of the Cold War assumes new responsibilities in a world warmed by the sunshine of freedom but threatened still by ancient hatreds and new plagues.”¹ Although this type of rhetoric is becoming increasingly common throughout the political process, beginning during the campaign and not ending until the farewell address, inaugurals lend themselves especially to the type of abstract imagery and historic remembrance in the above passage, delivered by Bill Clinton as he assumed the presidency in 1993, because of the traditional nature of the ceremony.

In light of the unusual circumstances of Clinton’s presidency, it is difficult to draw conclusions from any of his actions—rhetorical or otherwise—but to the degree that his rhetorical strategy corresponds with recent trends, it seems likely that history will judge his speeches as contributing to the downward spiral in which presidential rhetoric has been

¹ Bill Clinton, inaugural address, U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., 20 Jan. 1993.

heading in recent years. Such a tendency was also recognizable at the beginning of the nineteenth century; when inaugural addresses were first delivered in public, they began using language to which the people could more easily relate. Then, as today, adapting speeches to an increasingly popular audience inevitably led to a decline in the content of these addresses as they attempted to conjure more “unity symbols,” such as the image of the people “assuming new responsibility in a world warmed by the sunshine of freedom,” and to establish links to traditional American values.² Out of these symbols and images often come extended metaphors, such as President Clinton’s “bridge to the twenty-first century.” With this image, he was able to reinforce his forward-looking approach to politics in contrast with Bob Dole’s attachment to the past—but toward what end? One could argue that the policy-making process has become so complex, and the technical jargon of the federal government so dense, that representatives are justified in trying to simplify their explanations of the programs being considered and legislation being proposed. Nevertheless, the oversimplification resulting from the use of these metaphors only serves to distance the people from the government even further while making the political process seem even more empty. Even some of the most eloquent speeches may not mean anything to the people, who only hear flowing sentences, devoid of any real promises about the state of our nation.

Despite the accusations of “mere rhetoric” that have been bestowed upon Clinton since his first inauguration (if not his first presidential campaign), on one occasion he was able to ease the nation in a way that only the president can. After the Oklahoma City bombing, he gave an address not unlike Ronald Reagan’s after the *Challenger* explosion. As president, these leaders have the unique ability to relate *on a personal level* to citizens. They feel what Americans feel; our pain is their pain. Ironically, at a press conference the day before the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, Clinton had been asked whether he was still relevant; the next day’s events proved that he was. However, while this event may have represented Clinton’s finest hour, it was not one of his own making. Other presidents before him will be remembered for more than simply soothing the nation after a national tragedy.

Past leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt used their positions of authority to the advantage of the issues they supported (in addition to furthering the cause of their re-election) by using the “bully pulpit” to shape the direction of the country and public opinion; today’s

² Sigelman 81-2.

candidates and government leaders use opinion polls to guide them in their choice of positions to express in public discourse. As a result, political rhetoric has lost its value as a means for leaders to impress upon the public their more informed views on why a given program may be the most practical or to explain how support of an unpopular bill will benefit the people long after the representative has retired from office. In this way, then, “[i]t is possible that we have reached the end of the rhetorical presidency, that Bill Clinton, for all his words, is America’s first post-rhetorical president.”³ To regain effectiveness in addressing the people, a president “will need to remember that to be truly effective a speech must clarify thought and policy, and . . . he must educate his listeners rather than merely pander [to] them.”⁴

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 came the end of the longest-lasting “crisis” in American history. With nothing on the horizon to replace it, there does not even seem to be anything significant about which presidents could educate their constituents. Alas, presidential rhetoric does not appear likely to improve markedly in the near future, and no legislative reform could change its downward spiral. Over the course of six decades of crisis, the people have come to expect that their president will communicate with them on a regular basis, and a return to pre-Depression presidential distance from the people is no longer feasible. However, the idea of “creating” issues or crises is perhaps not as far-fetched as the 1998 film suggested. Indeed, such a plan, if executed correctly, might even contribute to American democracy and might compensate for some of the paradoxical aspects of modern presidential rhetoric. For instance, while Clinton’s weekly radio addresses about child car seats may focus on an important issue, it is not one about which the people will likely ever feel an urgent need to effect serious change. If, on the other hand, the lives of thousands of children were at stake, this issue might move audiences to action. Likewise, the conflict in Kosovo has succeeded in capturing the attention of the nation because of its sheer scale; because of the historical threat posed by conflicts such as that currently plaguing the region, Clinton has managed to draw the entire nation into the debate over what action, if any, is necessary. Crisis situations like this will likely prove to be the exception, not the rule, in twenty-first-century politics; in most cases, in the absence of such an obvious issue on which to focus, the challenge posed to the president will be to find a balance between laboring over car seats and waiting for the next

³ Carol Gelderman, “All the presidents’ words,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 19.2 (1995) 68-79.

⁴ Gelderman 68-79.

international hotspot to erupt into war. If the president must speak to the people, the responsibility rests with him to decide which issues truly matter; he will ultimately be judged on the basis of the problems he chooses to pursue. Richard Neustadt's 1960 insight remains valid today: the power of the president is *still* the power to persuade.⁵ Today, however, this power has shifted from the way in which the president chooses to persuade to the subjects about which he opts to be persuasive.

If the words of the president are ever to regain the credibility they once had, it will be the responsibility of future presidents to pursue such change. No American president has ever said that the state of the union was perfect. Political leaders today know that the country will never attain perfection. Thus, there are already many issues about which presidents could use rhetoric to promote change, as has been done with "wars" on poverty, drugs, and other societal ills. Not only do Americans relish the sense of pride that comes from "rallying around the flag," but Americans seem to *like* most wars, as demonstrated most recently by the Persian Gulf War, when even schoolchildren took an interest in Patriot missiles' record over Iraqi Scuds. Short of seeking out international wars in which to involve the United States, presidents can utilize rhetorical means to heighten awareness of, and subsequently remedy, long-standing domestic problems such as poverty or inequality. However, just as a war would dominate the president's agenda, these other efforts must focus on the single issue the president deems most urgent—and not a laundry list of reforms as in the average state of the union. Moreover, mere rhetoric is not enough. Just as Lyndon Johnson's Great Society began with a speech but did not end there, presidents need to make genuine and substantive efforts to enact the programs they endorse. Otherwise, the phrase "mere rhetoric" will continue to represent all presidential speech in the minds of Americans.

⁵ Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

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